Arifureta Shokugyou de Sekai Saikyou

(ありふれた職業で世界最強)

From Common Job Class to the Strongest in the World

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(厨二好き)

Story Description:

Among the class that was transported to another world, Nagumo Hajime is an ordinary male student who doesn't have ambition nor aspiration in life, called by his classmates as "Incompetent". The class is summoned to become heroes and save a country from destruction, students of these class are blessed with cheat specs and cool job class, but that's not the case with Hajime, his job class is a "Synergist" and his stats are very normal (mediocre). "Synergist", to put it in another word is just

artisan class. Being the weakest, he then falls to the depth of the abyss when he and his classmates are exploring a dungeon. What did he find in the depth of the abyss and can he survive?

Original Story can be found here:
Link

Arc III

Chapter 50: Ai-chan's Bodyguards
Chapter 51: Once Again, In Brook Town
Chapter 52: Adventurer-like Work
Chapter 53: Adventurers Guild, Fhuren Branch
Chapter 54: Branch Head's Request
Chapter 55: Reunion in the Lakeside Town
Chapter 56: Aiko's Worries
Chapter 57: The Northern Mountain Range Area
Chapter 58: Black Dragon Subjugation?
Chapter 59: Tio Clarce
Chapter 60: Sensei's Talk
Chapter 61: Goddess Advent?

Chapter 62: Ul Town's Trampling Drama
Chapter 63: Undesired Result
Chapter 64: Inside the Returning Vehicle
Chapter 65: Aiko Gone Mad
Chapter 66: Once Again in Fhuren
Chapter 67: Hajime becomes a Papa I
Chapter 68: Hajime becomes a Papa II
Chapter 69: Hajime becomes a Papa III
Chapter 70 : An Abnormal Situation
Chapter 71 : Versus Demon Race I
Chapter 72 : Versus Demon Race II
Chapter 73 : Even a Mob-character Has Things It Can Do
Chapter 74 : The Nostalgic Holad
Chapter 75 : To Accomplish One's Obligation

Chapter 76 : The Hero's Defeat
Chapter 77 : Accompanied By A Red Thunder
Chapter 78 : The Peerless Incompetent
Chapter 79 : The This and That After the Reunion
Chapter 80 : Declaration of War
Chapter 81 : Madness and Jealousy
Credits

Chapter 50: Ai-chan's Bodyguards

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Hatayama Aiko, 25 years old. Social studies teacher.

As a teacher she taught specialized knowledge to the students, she also tried to improve their academic performance. She wasn't someone who only gave guidance, but someone exemplary. Surely, those were serious matter for her, even more so, were her "allies"; those who thought of her as the most important person. To put it concretely, she was the adult that

the kids could depend on outside of their families.

This was influenced by a big event in her student days, but let's leave it at that. Anyway, as the ally of the students outside of their houses, Aiko's pride as a teacher became the pillar of support that helped her call herself a teacher.

Therefore, Aiko was extremely dissatisfied by their current situation. Suddenly, while she was stunned after being summoned to another world and arbitrarily forced into a fantastic situation. The student with the greatest charisma in class continued the talks instead of her. And then when she noticed her precious students were preparing for a war.

No matter how she tried to persuade them, the decided "flow" easily swept away her opinion, she was unable to stop her students at all.

"That's why, I will at least protect my students!". Is what she was determined to do, but with her rare abilities, she was told to settle with being useful with the duties outside of combat (farmland improvement and development). Although she desperately tried to oppose it, she was persuaded by her students. Aiko herself was unable to object to the point of view of the right person in the right place.

She spent every day anxiously thinking about the students who

were fighting beyond her reach. Guarded by temple knights of the Church of the Saints and imperial guards of the Herrlicht kingdom, she visited every farm village and undeveloped area, but when she finally completed that work and returned to the royal palace, what awaited her was a certain student's death.

At that time, Aiko blamed herself over and over for being unable to force herself to stay with them. "After all, aren't I just being carried away after thinking myself an ideal teacher!?" Something like that. Certainly, Aiko was perplexed because she couldn't even be certain if something might have changed with her being there. But, this incident gasun, struck

Hatayama Aiko's head as a teacher, in other words it awakened her.

Toward the students who were unable to stand up because of the overwhelming fear of "death," the church and the kingdom still wished for them to resume their war preparations. Aiko thought, "As if I would let it happen for a second time!", stood to oppose the church and the nobles of the kingdom. Using her position and abilities as her shield, she shouted out, "Don't come near my students," to corner them.

As a result, she somehow managed to gain victory. There were no students who refused to fight. But their hearts wavered because of Aiko's persistence. In addition, her

already high popularity was grew further. Although she wouldn't do anything like war, the ironic result was that, at the very least some of the encouraged students appeared to escort Aiko in her duties running all over the place.

"There's no need for you to fight" and "Because the knights are escorting me, I'll be okay", was how she persuaded them to give up, but some of the students stood up and said "We'll protect Ai-chan", filled to the brim with determination. Following that, she was eventually overwhelmed, afterward they followed her around the farmlands, and "I was swept around again. I am such a bad teacher...", while on all fours was still fresh in her mind.

By the way, this time, although the dedicated knights escorting Aiko assisted in persuading the students, somehow it became a situation where the students stubbornly refused to back down. If they asked why they opposed the bodyguards, as a consensus of all the students, they blocked everything with the words:

"As if we can leave Ai-chan to someone we don't know!"

The students' sense of crisis was directed at not thieves and demonic beasts on the road ahead, but rather it was turned towards Aiko's dedicated knights. Their reason was that all of the members were good-looking guys. This was the upper echelons' strategy to tie Aiko's

talent to the kingdom and church. In short, it was a honeytrap-thing. One of the students who noticed it informed the other students and "Protect Ai-chan from the good-looking military men corps" was formed.

However, there was a miscalculation made by the students. The so-called hunter becoming the hunted scenario. To prove it, these were the persuasive words that the knights gave the students.

Commander of the temple knights and the bodyguard, David:
"There is no need to worry. I'll protect Aiko. I won't let her get even a scratch. Aiko is... ... my everything"

Vice-commander of the temple knights, Chase:
"For her sake, I will even throw away my beliefs. I am determined to dedicate everything for Aiko. Don't you feel relieved even by this much?"

Imperial knight Chris:
"It's my destiny to meet Aiko-chan. Did you think I'll let my destined person die?"

Imperial knight Jade:
"... ... I swore to risk my life. Not as an imperial knight. But, as a man"

This time, the students thought, "Just what on earth happened!? They all had a change of heart!", something like that. In other words,

at first they thought it was Aiko who would fall into the honey-trap, but after hearing those words they shout, "We won't hand Ai-chan to unknown people!", as if they were her parents, they didn't want to part from Aiko's side.

It should be noted, what happened between Aiko and them... ... because it's a long story it'll be omitted, but Aiko's idleness and inborn diligence made a gap. Coupled with her sincerity which permeated her surroundings, they had already become Aiko's believer 'when they noticed,' well something along those lines. When told, it could become an entirely new story... ... so a lot happened. A lot of things.

With that said, currently, the

students were divided into Kouki's hero group, which continued to train inside the "Orcus Great Dungeon", the stay behind group, and Aiko's bodyguard group.

After that, two months after the messengers of the empire visited Herrlicht kingdom, Aiko and her party that improved and developed farmland were currently using the carriage to go develop a new farmland. Their destination was the lakeside town, Ul.

"Aiko, aren't you tired? There's no need to hold back if you're tired, you know? We'll immediately take a break, okay?"

"No, I am okay. David-san. Rather, didn't we just take a break a while

ago? I am not weak after all"

Inside the spacious and large carriage, the commander of Aiko's bodyguards'; David, worriedly talked to Aiko. Aiko's reply was mixed with a wry smile.

"Fufu, commander just can't stop worrying about Aiko-san. Because a while ago you were exhausted after just a day of travel... ... that's why I am also worried. Make sure to not hold yourself back, okay?"

"I apologize for the inconvenience that time. That was the first time I had traveled by carriage... ... but, I am really okay because I've become accustomed to it. Thank you very much for your concern. Chase-san"

At first, Aiko displayed disgraceful behavior because she had yet to experience how a carriage moved, she blushed because she was reminded of her past, and thanked the vice-commander of the bodyguards; Chase. Towards the blushing Aiko, Chase covered his mouth with his hand in agony, and tried to casually take Aiko's hand...
... "Gohonh!", his hand was stopped by a cough and a sharp gaze. The one who stopped him was a schoolgirl, Sonobe Yuka, who sat diagonally in front of Aiko. She was a member of "Protect Ai-chan from good-looking military men corps." Because they wouldn't know what might happen if there were only Aiko and good-looking military men inside the carriage, several members also came to board it.

By the way, there were eight people inside the carriage. Outside were knights on the scale of a platoon, they tried to hold back because it was already too late to tsukkomi about how only the commander and vice-commander were allowed to ride the carriage. These good-looking guys had also tried to give some reason or another to ride the carriage. They seemed to not want to be separated from Aiko.

"Oya, oya, I've been stared at. To have gathered so many wrinkles on your forehead, wouldn't it spoil your cute face?"

Chase said that accompanied with an ikemen-smile. It was an attractive smile that could make an

ordinary woman inadvertently blush. But, Yuka's reaction was, "Peh!", an expression of someone who wanted to spit on him even now.

"Not only Ai-chan sensei, do you also call other women "cute"? Ai-chan-sensei, this person is surely a bad philanderer. Please be careful, okay?"

Yuka believed a guy that's capable of saying another woman is "cute" in front of his beloved, wasn't a good guy. These guys also had realize they were used by their employers to honeytrap Aiko. They knew that their appearances were capable to making women's hearts flutter. Because she knew that, Yuka was irritated by Chase who

was able to smile daringly, and she made a small counter.

"S-Sonobe-san. Don't be that belligerent. Even though you finally called me "sensei," you still called me "Ai-chan"... ... isn't it okay to just use Aiko-sensei?"

"That won't do. Ai-chan-sensei is "Ai-chan," that's why nothing else will do except Ai-chan-sensei. That's the consensus of the students"

"Wh-what's with that, I don't understand it. Moreover, is it the students' common view? Is that the way this generation thinks? Work hard me, this is a trial for my dignity and reliability as a teacher! I must understand how my students

think at any cost!"

Toward Ai-chan-sensei who said to herself, "Fight-!", Yuka and Chase's awkward interactions, and similar atmosphere became warm and fuzzy. That's the reason why Aiko's called "Ai-chan," but she didn't notice. Her road to become a dignified teacher was a long one.

Even so, for the reliability part, the students were truly depending on Aiko. Even when seen from an outsider's point of view, she was the most familiar adult the students had, after all. Her recognition became stronger when she stood up to oppose the leaders of the kingdom and church. Especially toward the students that were brokenhearted because of Hajime's

death, Aiko became their mental support.

As a matter of fact, even for the students who requested to be Aiko's guards, the desire to simply be near Aiko was half of their reason for doing so. It should be noted that, the members of the Ai-chan's bodyguards, other than Sonobe Yuka were Sugawara Taeko, Miyazaki Nana, Aikawa Noboru, Kawahara Akira, Tamai Atsushi, and Shimizu Yukitoshi, a total of seven students.

From there, they traveled on carriage for four days.

Good-looking military men tried to approach Aiko, but Aiko, who thought everything they said was

for the sake of their employers, just let it pass through her ears. Aiko didn't notice that they had truly fallen for her. Added with the effect of students glaring at them when they tried to seduce her more than necessary, a heavy mood often came about. But it soon changed into a warm and fuzzy one because of Aiko's speech and behavior... ... and that repeated until the group finally arrived at the lakeside town, Ul.

After recovering from their travel fatigue, they began to survey Ul's outskirts' farmlands and made their plan of improvement. Although there were a lot of love-comedies with Aiko at the center during those times... ... that was also a story for another time.

Finally, they began to reform the farmlands, and recently she got "Goddess of Good Harvest" as her second name that started to spread from Ul town, then once again, a new incident occurred and squeezed Aiko's mind.

One of her students disappeared.

Aiko worked the best she could. All for the sake of her precious students. In the end, what awaited her was an impactful reunion that would end in an undesirable outcome.

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Chapter 51: Once Again, In Brook Town

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"Fufuh, your silliness, thoroughly show me how you sticky you get today!"

The crescent moon sometimes hidden by clouds illuminated the dark night. Even now, the face that possessed radiance peeped from above the clouds that was moved by the wind. That light began to illuminate a certain building on the ground. More accurately, a rope hanging from the roof of that

building, and what was illuminated was a girl that displayed excellent rappelling skills, just like a special forces from somewhere.

Surusuru, as she descended to the corner of a window in a certain room on the third floor, she turned around. While being upside down. her face peered in from the upper part of the window.

"For today's sake, I had Crystabel-san teach me her Climbing technique! I never thought of using it at this place, kukuku. Now, what kind of abnormal plays will you do, I will absolutely confirm it!"

"Haa haa," rough breathing came from the excited girl as she focused on peeping into the room before

her. Concealing herself, this girl was none other than Souna-chan; the inn girl of Brook Town's "Masaka Inn". Bright and energetic, able to talk without hesitation, and working hard all over the place. Even though she couldn't be called beautiful, the inn girl was simply lovely just like a blooming flower on a plain. There was a considerable amount of single men targeting her in this town.

That girl was currently using all the techniques she knew to "peep" on certain guests with all her might. If her expression was seen by the men who fell for her would make them instantly feel as if they'd been disillusioned... ... It was as if she was a perverted old man.

"Kuh, it is dark after all. I can't see anything. If only the angle shifted a little more..."

"Like this?"

"That's right, if it's from this angle... ... Even so, isn't it too quiet? Even I thought I'd hear more moaning..."

"Isn't it possible to use magic to intercept the sound?"

"Hah!? There is also that move! Kuu, how crafty! But, I won't give up! Even if it's only their silliness, I'll burn it into my eyes..."

Just saying this once more, here was outside the window on the third floor. Even if Souna was an idiot to the limits, she couldn't believe she'd

hear a voice from nearby. Souna instantly sweated like a waterfall, and gigigi, turned around with an awkward movement just like a machine that was forgotten to be oiled. There was...

Hajime standing in the sky like a Niou statue, with a cold smile plastered across his face.

"I-ich not what you think, you know? Dear customer. This is, that's, umm, right! A regular inn maintenance!"

"Hou~, in the middle of the night?"

"Th-that's right~. Look, if I don't do it some time in the middle of the night, such as during the day, the repair work will end up being seen.

Because it's an inn, there will be some backlash, right?"

"I see, isn't reputation an important thing?"

"Th-that's right! Reputation is important!"

"By the way, apparently there is a peeping tom in this inn. Do you know something about it?"

"Th-that's a serious situation! T-to peep, th-that's unforgivable, right?"

"Aa, just as you said. Isn't peeping unforgivable?"

"E, ee, it is unforgivable I think..."

Hajime and Souna looked at each

others' faces and "Hahaha", "Fufufu", laughed together. However, Hajime's eyes weren't laughing, and even though Souna was laughing, she was trembling a little while sweat continued to drop.

"Die."

"Hii—, I am sor~ry."

Hajime suddenly reverted to his serious look and iron clawed Souna's face. Merimeri, sounds came from Hajime's fingers. Souna who could only flail around in the air, let out a scream and desperately asked for forgiveness. Souna is an ordinary girl. That's why Hajime adjusted his power to a level that wouldn't overdo the punishment. If this was her first offense, then he

would've be more lenient. But the day after he returned from the Raisen Great Dungeon, and every night since they checked into the inn, she kept trying to peep using various methods. That's why his leniency was fading. By the way, the reason they were still staying at this inn was because the food was delicious.

Hajime could only let out a sigh and carry Souna, who was now only capable of twitching, in his arm. Souna was finally able to let out a relieved sigh when her face was released. But, when she looked down... ... there were devils. Even though there were smiles on their faces, they were her parents that looked like devils whose eyes didn't smile, just like Hajime's.

"Hii!!"

They noticed that Souna had seen them. She was slowly descending while her parents raised their hands to receive her. It was just like an invitation to hell.

"This time, it'll probably be forgiven only after a hundred spankings."
"Iyaaaa—!"

Towards Hajime's words, Souna remembered her punishments up to now, and was screaming. Surely, at breakfast the next day, he'll see Souna rubbing her swelling butt with teary eyes. Every night and every morning, Hajime could only sigh at such spectacles.

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Having handed Souna over to her parents, Hajime returned to his room and collapsed onto his bed.

"... ... Thanks for your hard work."
"Welcome home."

The ones who greeted Hajime were of course Yue and Shia. The room was illuminated by moonlight shining in through the windows, and the pair fleeting figures could be seen. The girls sitting on the opposite bed were Yue and also Shia who sat shamelessly. Only wearing negligees, their appearances were somewhat lascivious. Coupled with their beautiful faces, if they were drawn

on a painting, it'd be described as a masterpiece even by a second-class writer.

"Ou. Even so, what on earth drives that child... ... to even climb down from the roof, that's not normal, right? As expected, no matter how delicious the food, we should search for another inn."

Hajime spoke with an amazed tone. Standing up, Shia laughed and sat on Hajime's bed. Yue also steadily stood up and moved to Hajime's bed, then she put her knees below Hajime's head. As the result, they became lap pillows.

"Surely, our relationship has ignited the flames inside that Souna-chan's girly mind. It can't be helped for her

to be curious about us. Isn't that cute."

"... ... but, for her to become more and more skillful... ... it worries me."

"Yesterday, she used a handmade snorkel tube to hide at the bottom of the bathtub... ... When I saw her glaring and sparkling eyes, it made me shiver."

"U~n, certainly, that's bad manners for an inn's daughter... ... For now, it's only towards us but..."

While they chatted about Souna's eccentric behaviors, Shia quietly drew her body near Hajime. She naturally extended her hand, then guided Hajime's hand towards her breast. Shia's face turned crimson,

and she was nervous at what might happen from this situation.

Hajime gently grasped Shia's hand back. Kyuh, he put in more power that made Shia's body respond with a twitch. Because she was happy, she also put her power into her grasp. Hajime continued to put more strength into his grasp.

Kyuh... PIKUNh, Gyuh... BIKUNh, GIRIh... BIKUBIKU, MISHIh... GAKUBURU

"Wa-! Hajime-san! It will be crushed! My hand will be crushed!"

MEKyah!

"Hii—! I am sorry, I am really sorry! I just got a little carried away! That's

why release it! It'll break! I'm going to break if you do anymore than this!"

"What are you trying to do by casually making a good mood? To begin with, your room is next door. So why are you here?"

Towards her hand that was gripped by Hajime, Shia tried to somehow release it while trembling, but she couldn't release it because of the vise-like grasp.

"Th-that's, I was just wondering~ if I can get into the same bed ☆, something like that. Rather, our relationship is already at the stage where we kiss. It's okay if it's only that much."

"As if. Even though I have said it was a life-saving action."

"Well, from my intuition, Hajime-san has started to become dere! Compared to the beginning, you've become very gentle! Because that is a fact, then... ... Guhehe "MEKHOBAKIh" Doon't—! It's going to break—!"

Unable to endure hearing Shia's rude plans, Hajime inadvertently put more power into his grip. Shia whose hand was released, trembled at the edge of the bed while crouching and holding her hand to endure the pain. Ignoring Shia, Hajime turned his glance toward Yue. Yue immediately looked straight at Hajime.

"Rather, Yue. Recently, aren't you too lenient? Did you have a change of heart?"

Yue tilted her head and thought about Hajime's questions. Just as Hajime said, having returned from Raisen's Great Dungeon, Yue's attitude towards Shia become more lenient. Before, when Shia tried to stick to Hajime she'd immediately blow her away without arguing, but recently she didn't say anything about Shia's skinship. Even so, if it was something excessive... ... for example when Shia tried to kiss him, she'd immediately become displeased...

"... ... Shia did her best. She'll continue doing that from now on. Because she likes Hajime and me."

"Nn? Well, that's so..."

"... ... I also... ... don't hate her."

"No matter what, you're actually getting along well. I can understand that just by watching. Nn~"

The main point that Hajime guessed from Yue's few words, Yue was pleased by Shia, but not at the level of thinking of her as someone important.

That was the truth. Inside Raisen's Great Dungeon was magic power disintegration that was even stronger than in the ravine, so Yue was unable to display her full power. It was the same with Hajime. They could guess how

much hardship they'd have experienced if it were just the two of them. Surely, Hajime alone would be able to clear it, in exchange, the probability of him using one or two Holy Waters was high. To be able to conquer it without consuming them could be considered as thanks to Shia.

Just a little while ago, Shia was an existence that had no connection to fighting. Rather than being unrelated, it was more like she disliked it. This girl was surely frightened and uneasy, but she kept following Hajime and Yue without complaining. They went into the hell-like Great Dungeon, and while grinding her teeth, she was finally able to beat it with a splendid result.

She was single-mindedly doing that for the sake of her love towards Hajime, and her friendship toward Yue. Because she wanted to be together with them, Shia had changed herself and advanced ahead with all her might.

Yue of course held jealousy and a desire to monopolize him. Therefore, Shia's feelings towards Hajime were not easily acknowledged. That's why, at first, although it was hard to support it... ... towards Shia who's able to jump straight even after being treated cruelly, friendship was spread after so many times, following that it was further proven by how they conquered the Great Dungeon... ... that became the tangible proof.

If she thought about it, Yue had no memory of anyone she could call her friend. Before she was sealed, she was busy with studying politics. There was no one who could be her friend on equal footing. In other words, she was alone. That's why, toward Shia who said, "We are comrades~!", straight without being two faced, excluding the parts about Hajime, from the beginning she was unable to hate her.

Because of that, regarding Hajime recently, "Well, if it is Shia then just a little...", she showed her generosity.

"... ... Even so."
"Nn?"

Yue looked up at Hajime while continuing her words. Her eyes were bewitching and filled with sincerity, confidence, and resolution. Added to Yue's gleaming smile that also reflected all of the above, she was so lovely, so charming, and made Hajime instinctively hold his breath. As if she was possessing gravity, Hajime was unable to move his glance and could only look at her in admiration. Hajime once again returned the look at Yue.

"... ... Hajime's heart is already mine."

"... ..."

No matter who else loves Hajime, no matter who else came to be

attached to him, the number one, the most important is... ... me. There was such a declaration. Yue's declaration of war. A declaration of war toward those they had, and would meet from now on.

Hajime was speechless. He was sucked in by the radiance of her eyes, Yue once again as if entwined by him, caught Hajime's glance. Following that, Hajime's hand touched Yue's cheek, while Yue put her hand over his. The moonlight reflected their shadows on the wall, their shadows slowly became closer. Then, at the moment they almost met...

"Gusuh, umm, can you at least please stop forgetting my existence? It feels so empty and lonely... ...

gusuh."

Shia was sitting while holding her knees on the corner of the bed; while crying and wiping her tears she watched Hajime and Yue create a world for two people.

It was a truly pitiful appearance, Hajime felt somewhat bad, and Yue was telling her to come closer. "Yue-zaa~n", while shouting that, Shia dived into Yue's bosom and sniffled. Shia's head was gently stroked, and because it felt pleasant she closed her eyes, then started to sleep just like that.

Hajime who saw their appearance could only wryly smile and say,

"Rather than a friend, aren't you

more like a mother?"

"... ... I prefer Hajime's child."

"... ..."

"... ... Won't you be gentler to Shia?"

"... ... About that, I'll do my best."

"Nn... ... I love you"

"... ... Ou"

In the end, with Shia on his left side and Yue on his right side, the three of them fell asleep. After this day, Shia who was allowed to be in the same room would dance in ecstasy, and get carried away by repeatedly trying to attack Hajime every night, only to be severely punished by

him.

By the way, at the time Shia screamed when her hand was grasped, Souna who heard that further intensified her misunderstanding, curiosity, and her delusions. Then she became an inn girl that possessed high infiltration skills... ... but this was another story.

* * *

KARAN, KARAN

Accompanied by the sound of bells, the door of the adventurer's guild: Brook's branch opened. Three silhouettes entered, they were

Hajime, Yue, and Shia who had completely become celebrities after several days. Inside the guild's cafe, several adventurers spend their time freely just like usual, but there were some who greeted Hajime and his party by raising a hand when they noticed them. As for the men, they looked at Yue and Shia as usual, then turned their glances filled with envy toward Hajime, but there were no malicious ones here.

They had stayed at Brook town for a week, there were several people who didn't learn and caused a commotion by challenging him to a duel to obtain Yue or Shia during that time. In the past, they were unable to persuade Yue who was known as "Crotch Smasher" because they were frightened by

her, as such they tried to capture Hajime and bury him outside the moat.

Of course, Hajime wouldn't do something as troublesome as that. Finally, "Duel me!", when the line was only on "Duel," he already fired the gun. What shot out was a non-lethal rubber bullet that exploded as it hit the pitiful challenger's head, and made him spin three times, then kiss the ground.

Because of that, in the town, Yue the "Crotch Smasher" and her loved person, the one who was capable of killing his enemy in a blink before the duel even started, Hajime the "Duel Smasher" combination became famous people to be reckoned. Even though they didn't

apply a party name to the guild, the name "Smasher Lovers" already spread, and Hajime who discovered their nickname could only look off into the distance for a while, because of this new memory.

By the way, as a side note, Shia who felt her existence become thinner could only shed tears.

"Oya, the three of you are together today?"

Hajime and his party approached the counter, just as usual, aunt... ... Catherine was there, and she was the one that greeted them just now. Catherine's voice was filled with surprise because in this one week the ones who came to guild were usually either Hajime alone or Shia

and Yue as a pair.

"Aa. We'll leave the town tomorrow, and because we are indebted to you, we came to greet you. Furthermore, we thought of accepting it if you have any commissions related to our destination"

What he meant by indebted, was how Hajime had borrowed a guild's room for free. Because he finally gained Gravity magic, he wanted to experiment: combining it with Creation magic, that's why he needed a spacious room. Catherine who happened to hear about it offered the use of a guild room for free.

It should be noted that Yue and Shia trained to use gravity magic on

the town's outskirts.

"I see. So you're going to leave. That'll make me lonely. It's been lively since you came back here after all~"

"Please give me a break. There is a pervert in the inn, there is also a pervert in the dress store, there are also those perverts who start to prostate when Yue and Shia walk in town and stalker perverts who call them "Onee-sama," there were also idiots who challenged me to duels... ... there were no decent fellows at all. Of all the guys I met, 70% are perverts and 20% are idiots... ... just what's wrong with this town"

All of the complaints that Hajime said while scowling were the truth.

Let alone Souna, everytime Hajime met Crystabel, she always licked her lips while looking at him like a carnivore, he already forgot how many times he felt chills.

Moreover, there were three major factions created inside Brook town, they tried to compete with each other every day. One was the "We want to be stepped on by Yue-chan corps", the other was the "We want to be Shia-chan's slaves corps," and the last one was the "We want to be onee-sama's siblings corps". Respectively, they literally hold those as their wishes, and it seems they competed on which side would be the majority.

Hajime and his party could only spurt out their drinks because those

names were the opinion of the masses. Suddenly there were people inside the town prostrating to Yue saying "Please step on us!" It made her shiver. It was not known how extreme their thought processes were to be like that for Shia. The demi-human race should have been under discrimination, so the way they wanted to become her slaves was a full chance for tsukkomi, but she immediately refused them because it was unpleasant to think deeply about it. The last was a group of only women, maybe because they saw him as an obstruction to Yue and Shia, they mainly tried to eliminate Hajime. Once, "The harmful and parasitic pest to Onee-sama! I'll remove his ballssss—!!", a girl screamed that while thrusting a knife toward him

in one hand.

Because it'd be troublesome to kill a girl inside town after all, Hajime only left that girl naked in a tortoise shell-like bondage (because he had no knowledge about it) situation, after hanging her on the highest building, and leaving after sticking on a piece of paper that read, "I'll kill you next time." Because of the indifferent content in the paper he left behind, the girls' extreme actions became more hidden, and that's a good thing.

Hajime who recalled those events could only frown, while Catherine let out a bitter smile.

"Now, now, the lively part is the truth."

"Right, it sure is."
"Then, where are you going?"
"Fhuren"

Even though they talked in that manner, Catherine was working diligently. Immediately, she started searching whether there was a request related to Fhuren.

Fhuren was a neutral commercial city. Hajime and his party's next destination was "Guryuen Great Desert", where one of the Seven Great Dungeons; "Guryu-en Volcanic Mountain", resided. Therefore, they must go toward the west of the continent, and on the way was the "Neutral Commercial City Fhuren", so they wanted to drop by the continent's number one commercial city. It should be noted

that after "Guryu-en Volcanic Mountain", their next destination was further west of the Great Desert, the Great Dungeon that had sunk into the seabed; "Meljine Seabed Ruin".

"U~n, oh my. I found something good. A request to escort a merchant company. There's a vacancy for one person... ... How is it? Are you going to accept?"

Hajime confirmed the contents of the commission he received from Catherine. Certainly, the content was a request to escort a merchant company. It was a medium-scale merchant company, and it seemed to request 15 people as the escorts. Because Yue and Shia were not adventurers, it was perfect for

Hajime.

"Is it OK to take my companions along?"

"Aa, no problem. Although there would be complaints if there are too many people, but there are people hired to carry the luggage, and there are also adventurers who brought their slaves along. Furthermore, Yue-chan and Shia-chan are also influential people. To have another two excellent adventurers in addition when hiring a person. There's no reason to refuse."

"I see, nn~, what should we do?"

Hajime who was a little hesitant, looked back at Yue and Shia to ask for their opinions. Truthfully, he

thought of accepting the request if it had something to do with delivering packages. If it had been only Hajime and his party, they could have used the Magic-Driven vehicle and arrived at Fhuren much sooner than if they had to use a carriage. It would be too troublesome to match the pace of the others in an escort mission.

"... ... No need to travel in a rush."

"That's right~, sometimes it may be good to go with other adventurers. We might be able to learn the know-how from the veteran adventurers, right?"

"... ... That's true. Since we aren't in a hurry, sometimes it might be good..."

Having heard their opinions, Hajime was, "Fumu", and told Catherine that he accepted the request. It was just as Yue had said, it would take a lot of time to conquer the Seven Great Dungeons. There's no telling what kind of mistake they might make if they tried to rush it. That's why the know-how peculiar to adventurers would likely be useful in their future travels, as Shia had said.

"Here you go. I'll notify the client, so please go to the front gate tomorrow, first thing in the morning."

"Roger."

After she confirmed that Hajime

received the application form, Catherine turned her eyes toward Yue and Shia who were behind him.

"You must keep yourself healthy, okay? Whenever this child makes you cry, please come back here. I'll beat him for you."

"... ... Nn, we are indebted to you. Thanks."

"Yes, Catherine-san. Thank you very much for taking care of us!"

Catherine's kind-filled words made Yue and Shia smile. Shia was especially happy. She seemed to have forgotten that she was of the demi-human race, ever since she arrived at this town. Of course, there were different strokes for

different blokes. Not all of them were friendly in regards to Shia, but with Catherine at the top, there were Souna, Crystabel, and some people like her fans, who didn't discriminate against her, even though she was a demi-human. It was not known whether that was because of the locality or the people's nature or the flow of this town, but for Shia, this was a warm place, almost like her hometown in the Sea of Trees.

"You too, don't you let these good girls cry, okay? I'll punish you if you don't value them as the most important, alright?"

"... ... Geez, what a meddlesome person. I'll do that even without you telling me."

Hajime replied to Catherine's words with a wry smile. Catherine held out a letter towards Hajime. With a doubtful expression, Hajime received the letter.

"This is?"

"You're carrying various problems in your arms after all. It is an apology for all the trouble caused by the people of this town. When you arrive at another town's guild and get into trouble, show this letter to the person in-charge. It might prove to be useful."

Catherine perfectly added a wink, and Hajime's cheeks inadvertently cramped. "For a letter to be able to influence the person in-charge, just

who on earth are you?", his doubt could be seen in his expression.

"Oh my, is there a need to investigate me? A good woman is someone that holds secrets, after all."

"... ... Haa, un'stood. I will gladly take it."

"It's good to be obedient! Although a lot of things might happen, please don't die."

Catherine was a staff of the guild in a remote countryside town, and held a lot of mysteries. She sent Hajime and his party off with a charming smile that contained attractiveness.

Afterwards, Hajime and his party drew near Crystabel's place. Although Hajime refused to come along, he could only reluctantly come because of Yue and Shia... ... but, the moment it heard that they wanted to leave town, Crystabel became a huge monster, and tried to attack Hajime, since this was her (Crystabel's) last chance. Hajime, who was so scared, used the oscillation fracture to bury it. Although Yue and Shia were able to desperately stop the traumatic event... ... The details will be omitted.

When she heard it was their last night, Souna finally managed to trespass into the bathroom with a dignified demeanor. That action was followed by her charging into

their room, then her parents, who were completely angered by her, tied her with genuine tortoise shell bondage all night long. The event where she was hung in front of the inn would be omitted. The reason why her parents knew how to tie the tortoise shell bondage will also be omitted.

The next morning.

With pleasant memories of Brook's townspeople, Hajime and his party arrived at the front of the gate, moved towards the merchant company's facilitator and other adventurers who accepted the escort request. Apparently they were the last ones to arrive. When the facilitator-like person and the 14 adventurers looked at the

incoming Hajime and his party, they caused a commotion at once.

"O-Oi, don't tell me the remaining three are the "Sma-Love"!?

"It's true! Although it makes me happy and frightened at the same time!"

"Look at my hands. They haven't stopped trembling since a while ago, you know?"

"Wait, isn't it because you're drunk?"

There were those who were happy with Yue and Shia's appearance, some hid their groin with both hands while teary-eyed, and one with trembling hands who got

tsukkomi'ed by his companion, various reactions. Hajime approached them with a very displeased expression, then the facilitator-like person called out to him.

"Are you the last escorts?"
"Aa, this is the application."

Hajime showed the application that he took out of his chest pocket. After confirming it, the male facilitator nodded in consent and began to introduce himself.

"My name is Mottou Junker. I am the leader of this merchant company. Although your rank is still blue, I heard you're excellent adventurers from Catherine-san. I expect you to escort us along the

way."

"... ... Motto(more) Yunker ? ... ... It must be difficult to be the leader of a merchant company... ..."

[T/N: Yunker is a Japanese formulated energy and health supplement.]

It was a name that reminded him of a certain health tonic from Japan, and Hajime's eyes were filled with sympathy. Mottou, who was unable to understand why Hajime looked at him with such eyes, only inclined his neck and replied with, "Well, it was difficult but I've become accustomed to it," as if he was wryly smiling..

"Well, I won't betray your expectations. I am Hajime. Here are

Yue and Shia."

"That's reassuring... ... By the way, this person from the Rabbitman tribe... ... Won't you sell her? I can only pay a moderate price though."

Mottou glanced at Shia while appraising her. She was a beautiful girl of the Rabbitman tribe who wasn't blue-haired like the normal Rabbitman tribe member, but possessed gray hair instead. As a merchant's nature, he couldn't help but lay his hands on such a rare commodity. He judged her as a slave from her collar, then immediately proposed negotiation to Hajime; the owner. Surely he must be an excellent merchant.

Having received the glance, Shia,

"Ugh," groaned unpleasantly and hid behind Hajime. Yue looked at Mottou with a severe look. The popular perception of a Rabbitman tribe outside the Sea of Trees was a slave, that's why it was natural to offer trade negotiations for such an unusual slave. There was no reason to blame Mottou.

"Hoo, she seems fairly attached... ... somehow, she also seems to be cherished. Then, I will give you some discounts, how about it?"

"Well, since you seem to be an excellent merchant... ... shouldn't you already know the answer?"

Although Mottou, who had seen Shia's appearance, was interested and offered a more appealing

proposal, Hajime's reply was simple. Nevertheless, Mottou felt he should not let go of this chance to negotiate with Hajime, since it will surely bring forth large profit that will only increase thanks to Shia's charm. That's why, he tried to give out more bargaining chips to lengthen their conversation.

However, Hajime had read his intentions. Though they were simple words, he voiced them to Mottou with an unwavering will.

"Even if it was god who wanted her, I still wouldn't let her go... ... Won't you understand with this much?"

"... ... ... Ee, I understand. It can't be helped. I'll withdraw here. However, if you ever change your

mind, by all means please visit my Junker company. Well then, it's almost time to depart. For the details on escorting, please ask the leader over there."

Hajime's words were actually dangerous ones. If it was done unskillfully, his words would have branded him as a heretic by the Church of the Saints. As a side note, the demon race believes in a different god, they worshipped different gods than the strongest god in history; "Ehito", but they didn't directly try to fight the Church of the Saints. Since Hajime didn't drastically alter his words, therefore, Mottou understood that Hajime, from the bottom of his heart, refused to let Shia go.

Hajime watched as Mottou dejectedly returned to his merchant company, then he noticed the surroundings become noisy again.

"Wow... ... For the sake of a woman, to even say that much... ... It numbed me!"

"As expected of Duel Smasher. He won't forgive anyone who puts their hands on his woman... ... fuh, what a man."

"That's nice~, I also wanted someone to say something like that to me at least once."

"Wait, you, aren't you a man? Who would, say someth—, sorry, I am sorry, so sto— Ah——!!"

Having heard the happy conversations of his amused escort companions, Hajime could only hold his head in his hands due to the headache. All of the fellows from Brook town were idiots as expected. While he thought that, 'Munyuu', he could feel something soft on his back, furthermore Hajime was embraced closely by the arms that came from behind him.

Hajime turned his head over his shoulder, and saw a close-up of Shia's face as she rested her chin on his shoulder. Her face completely dyed red, and because she was truly happy, her expression loosened.

"... ... Listen, there was no special meaning to it, so don't misunderstand, okay?"

"Ufufufu, I know~, ufufufu~"

Although Hajime explained that, in the end it was akin to not abandoning a relative, and not because "she is his woman", like the surrounding people noisily described. His explanation was not transmitted to Shia. It was because the man she fell for had declared that "Even if it's god, I won't let her go." No matter what his real intentions were by declaring that, a pleasant thing is pleasant.

Even though those words were to quickly break off the negotiation, in a lot of ways it was "overkill," and Hajime could only feel regret. Yue tokotoko, went to Hajime's side, then kuikui, she pulled Hajime's sleeve.

"? What is it, Yue?"

"Nn... ... Don't worry about it, because that was cool."

"... ... Thanks for the consolation."

Having sympathized with Hajime's feelings, Yue tried to comfort him, and Hajime gently stroked her cheeks while letting out words of gratitude. Yue closed her eyes as if she was pleased by it.

In front of the front gate early in the morning, inside a crowd of people, with a beautiful rabbit-eared girl that looked so happy attached to his back, and another beautiful blonde girl with crimson eyes in his right hand, was Nagumo

Hajime.

The ladies of the merchant company looked at them with lukewarm expressions, while the men looked at the spectacle with dead-fish eyes. Toward these annoying gazes and words that pierced Hajime, surely he just reaped what he had sown.

Chapter 52: Adventurer-like Work

* * *

Using carriages, the distance between Brook Town and the Neutral Commercial City; Fhuren, was six days of travel.

They moved before sunrise and prepared to camp before sunset. This has already repeated for three days. Hajime and his party were three days away from Fhuren. Only half the travel distance remained. So far no incidents had occurred during their journey. Even though

Hajime and his party were in charge of the rear, it was truly peaceful.

Even today, nothing special happened as they prepared to camp. Regarding meals, the adventurers were eating by themselves. They had to eat while minding their surroundings, that's why, as escorts they couldn't settle down when eating together. It also seemed to be the rule to eat on their own. Additionally, when on a mission, the adventurers only eat cruel, simple meals. In a way, preparing tasty meals would only increase their luggage, and would disturb them in emergency situations. Because of that, it became a theory that after they've arrived at a town they would eat tasty meals until their stomachs

were full, as their reward.

That story was something Hajime and his party heard from the adventurers when they ate meals on the second day. Hajime and his party had prepared warm bread soaked in luxurious mock stew to eat.

"Gah—, good! It is truly delicious~, just as expected of Shia-chan! Mou, I don't care if you're a demi-human anymore, so will you be my wife?"

"Gluck gluck, gulp, puhah, bastard, don't just run your mouth! Shia-chan is my wife!"

"Hah, just what is a small dirty pig-like man like you trying to say? Know your place. By the way Shia-

chan, how about a meal with me after we arrive at the town? Of course, it'll be my treat."

"Th-Then, I'll take Yue-chan! Yue-chan, have a meal with me!"

"Yue-chan's spoon... ... Haa, haa."

The adventurers kept eating the mock stew made by Shia, saying it was delicious. On the first day, these guys were eating dried meat with things similar to camping goods when, Hajime and his party started to cook next to them, using ingredients and tableware taken out from "Treasure Box", just as usual. The adventurers were attracted by the delicious drifting aromas. Looking around, they saw Hajime and his party eating the hot meal

while blowing on it, nearby. It became a situation where all of the other adventurers stared at them with blood-shot eyes and drooling mouths. Shia who felt that they were truly pitiful proposed to share their meals, resulting in the current situation.

In the beginning, even in front of these starving dogs, Hajime continued to calmly eat his meal. Naturally, he didn't intend to share at all. However, because Shia took over the job of preparing the meals when they camp, he had to rely on her to make delicious meals. It was not like Hajime and Yue were incapable of cooking anything, but the taste would be flat. Hajime was only capable of making manly dishes while Yue was

inexperienced, being a former noble. That's why, it was not an easy thing for Hajime to refuse Shia's, who was able to cook delicious meals, proposal to share.

From then on, although at first the adventurers that crowded like hyena during meals were grateful, they started to get carried away and jokingly tried to persuade Shia and Yue.

Toward the adventurers who made such a ruckus, Hajime silently used "Pressure". Although their bodies should have been warmed up by the hot mock stew, the adventurers immediately felt the chill and could only stand still with pale expressions. Hajime swallowed the meat inside his mouth and glanced

at the mock stew while slowly letting out a whisper. Even so his voice could be clearly heard by everyone.

"So? Having filled your belly, who's the guy that wants to be thrown?"

""""""I am sorry for getting carried away."""""

The adventurers apologized while prostrating in splendid harmony and synchronization. Although these guys were senior and veteran adventurers compared to Hajime, they had no dignity at all. Even though there was also the "Pressure" that Hajime used, it wasn't like they would go against Hajime, because they knew what happened in Brook town.

"Mou, Hajime-san. Since it's finally time for a meal, a little ruckus is fine. A-Also, no matter what they say, I-I am Hajime-san's, you know?"

"I never cared about that."

"Hau!?"

Although Shia tried to casually appeal to Hajime while feeling shy, Hajime cut off her words with a single phrase.

"... ... Hajime."

"Nn?... ... What is it, Yue?"

Because of Yue's criticizing glance, Hajime flinched a little. Yue pointed

her forefinger and said, "... ... bad!". In short, it was about his promise from before to be nicer to Shia. Hajime, who didn't harbor love for Shia even now, thought it was enough to treat her as a relative... ... however it seemed that was an out for Yue.

"Hajime-san! If you keep that attitude, I won't give you the "well-done" skewered meat!"

Following that, recently Shia was not as easily discouraged. She didn't even twitch at Hajime's tsun-remark. Even if she received the shock, she immediately revived and repeated her strong and positive approach.

"... ... Like I said, how did you know

that mate-... ... no, it's nothing. I understand, so quickly hand over the meat."

"Fufu, do you want to eat it? Th-Then, a~n"

"... ..."

While blushing, Shia presented the well-done skewered meat in front of Hajime's mouth. He seemed to really want to eat it. That's why Hajime took a peek at Yue. Yue readily stood by his side with skewered meat at hand. Probably, she would follow after Shia's "A~n".

While feeling the adventurers' gazes, Hajime let out a sigh then opened his mouth toward Shia. Shia's expression was dyed in

happiness.

"A~n."
"... ..."

Hajime bit then chewed the presented meat in silence. Shia's expression was in pure bliss while she looked at Hajime. Then, this time another skewered meat was presented from his other side.

"... ... A~n."
"... ..."

He once again took a bite. Silently chewed it. Again, he took a bite when Shia from his other side, "A~n". He bit again when Yue said "A~n".

Their subjectivity aside, the voices

of the men's hearts who had objectively seen this spectacle were splendidly unified. In their minds, "We beseech you, please just explode already!!". They could only use formal words in their minds because they were clearly shown that they couldn't do anything in face of Hajime's power .

Two days had passed since then. The distance was only one more day of travel, finally someone appeared to inelegantly obstruct their travel and to assault them.

Shia was the first to notice it. Her rabbit ears, piko piko, moved while pointing toward the forest beside the highway, her unconcerned expression suddenly tightened and she warned the others.

"Incoming enemies! They number more than 100! They'll come from the forest!"

When they heard her warning, the tension between the adventurers immediately increased. The highway that they were currently advanced on was not known for the danger from the adjacent forest. After all, it was the only route to the one Neutral Commercial City in the continent. The highway was safe, was what was guaranteed. That's why, although there were stories of encountering demonic beasts, they were only 20, at most. Even if there were a lot of them, 40 was the limit.

"Shit, more than 100 you say? Recently, I haven't heard stories of

assault. are they saving up their power for this time's sake? Damn, even though I had investigated about accidents along the highway!"

The leader of the escorts, Galitima, was cursing with a bitter expression. The escorts of the merchant company numbered 15. If Yue and Shia were included, they became 17 people. Considering the number of people, it'd be difficult to flawlessly defend the merchant company. It was simply because they were overwhelmed in number.

By the way, for them to calculate Shia as a combat potential despite knowing the Rabbitman tribe's gentle nature was because there was a time when Shia lost her

temper by the extreme actions of the "We want to be Shia-chan's slaves corps". She blew off those perverts at once, that became well-known to adventurers and made them awe.

The moment Galitima started thinking of letting the majority of the escorts stay and at least making the merchant company escape, a proposal's voice rang out and interrupted his thinking.

"If you're perplexed, should we kill them?"
"Eh?"

It was said with a light-hearted tone, as if he was just going to go for a little shopping. The unbelievable proposal came from

none other than Hajime. Galitima was able to grasp the significance of Hajime's proposal, then spontaneously asked back with a stupid voice.

"Like I said, shall we annihilate them?"

"W-Well, that's certainly, because it'll be difficult to flawlessly defend the merchant company if this keeps up... ... umm, can you do it? Although there are no strong demonic beasts around here, their numbers are..."

"There is no problem with the numbers. It'll end soon. With Yue, that is."

Hajime said that and immediately

put his hand on Yue's shoulder who moved beside him. Yue looked particularly eager, and as if it would be very easy work for her, she replied with "Nn...".

Galitima hesitated a little. At least he had heard the rumors that Yue was a user of rare magic. For argument's sake, even if she couldn't completely annihilate them, from the attitude of Hajime and his party they should be able to cut down a reasonable number. That's why, rather than letting the merchant company escape ahead using their various combat potential, he steadily thought of another strategy.

"I understand. I'll entrust the first strike to Yue. Even if you can't

completely annihilate them, it'll be no problem as long as their numbers considerably decrease. Then, we only need to decrease them further with our magic, and beat the last of them directly. Everyone, you understand!?"

""""Affirmative!""""

The other adventurers replied to Galitima's decision with voices filled with spirit. Apparently, it seemed they couldn't believe Yue was able to annihilate them alone. Hajime thought in his mind, "There is no need to worry that much~", but because it was not common sense for magic-users to be capable of annihilating more than a hundred of demonic beasts, he felt their judgement couldn't be helped

as he shrugged his shoulders.

The adventurers took a united line in front of the merchant company. Although tension hung in the air, their faces were resolute. There was no remaining joking atmosphere, like the one during meal time. On the way, even though they had heard various stories from the veteran adventurers, only by seeing their current appearance, indeed, they were able to nod and acknowledge them as veterans. The people of the merchant company were frightened when they heard the large number of demonic beasts, now their faces peeped in from the shadows of the carriages.

Hajime and his party were on the roof of the merchant company's

carriage.

"Yue, for now, start chanting. If not, it'll become troublesome."

"... ... Chant... ... chant... ...?"

"... ... Did you not know any?"

"... ... Don't worry, there's no problem."

"Well, that material... ... It's nothing."

"Contact in 10 seconds~"

Because it'd be troublesome if others inquired about it, Hajime told Yue to use chants, but Yue who originally had no need to chant was only able to float "?" above her

head. Even so, it would be good as long as she made them assume she was chanting by whispering, although there shouldn't be any big problems, her reply somehow made Hajime anxious.

While he thought of that, Shia's report rang out. Yue, suh, turned and hung her right hand toward the forest, then her chanting voice began to permeate.

"You are the one who brought bright red light into this perpetual darkness, crush the prison of old, the one who met face on as an equal, using the power of the strongest fragment, together with him, become the light capable of swallowing heaven, "Thunder Dragon""

With the end of Yue's chant, she pulled the magic's trigger. At that moment, a dragon made of thunder appeared from the dark cloud just like in her chant. Its appearance was reminiscent of a snake just like an oriental dragon.

"Wh-What's that..."

It wasn't known who muttered that. Even with the crowd of demonic beasts in front of their eyes, everyone's gazes were fixated at the sky towards the bizarre thunder dragon that let out blue electrical discharge. Even those who were well-versed in magic in the rear, could only open and close their mouths towards the magic they've never seen nor heard before.

Then, as if it was no one's ally. The demonic beasts that had come with killing intent for their prey from the forest, came to a halt between the merchant company and the forest, having been glared at by the huge thunder dragon, it was as if they were frogs that were stiffened by a snake's glare.

Following that, as if it was heaven's judgement, Yue flicked her slender and beautiful fingers, causing the thunder dragon opened its jaws that were even able to swallow heaven and attacked the demonic beasts.

GOoGAaAAA!!!

"Uwah!?"
"Dowaaa!?"

"Kyaaaaa!?"

The thunder dragon let out a tremendous roar from its huge opened mouth, and some demonic beasts were voluntarily jumping into the opened jaws. Then, they were eliminated by the jaws of thunder and disappeared without any resistance.

Furthermore, as Yue commanded, the thunder dragon coiled around the demonic beasts to encircle them. The demonic beasts that were in the middle of escaping penetrated that wall of thunder and turned into dust before their eyes. Once again, above the demonic beasts that had lost their escape route, the thunder dragon opened its jaws with a thundering roar, and

the demonic beasts jumped into it as if they chose to die. Without any time to suffer the pain, their flesh turning into dust coupled with the majestic appearance of the dragon gave off a solemn atmosphere. Having swallowed all of the demonic beasts, the thunder dragon let out a thundering roar for the last time then disappeared.

Every one of the adventurers that were in formation and the merchant company, because of the flashes along with thundering sounds, and followed by a severe earthquake were inadvertently screaming and crouching. Finally, the fear of a life-threatening attack and the impact left them, and when they opened their eyes slightly to see what happened ahead... ... there

was nothing at all. There was only the ground, scorched in a coil-shape, it was proof that the unreal spectacle just now had truly occurred.

"... ... Nn, I overdid it"

"Oioi, that magic, even I know nothing about it..."

"It is a Yue-san original, right? It seems to be a combination of magic that's used in the stories of dragons from Hajime-san as a reference."

"To have made something like this when I shut myself inside the guild... ... Rather, Yue, the chant just now..."

"Nn... ... A song of meeting and the

future."

Yue looked at Hajime with expressionlessness that gave off an, "How about that!", atmosphere. She was probably proud of it because it was something she made herself. Hajime quietly used his hand to stroke Yue's hair gently while letting out a wry smile. Having allowed her to finish the chant to avoid trouble, although it was completely meaningless, his caution disappeared once he saw Yue boasting about herself.

That was Yue's original magic; "Thunder Dragon". It's a compound magic using the high-ranked magic; "Thunder Hammer" that creates a dark cloud then drops a huge amount of lightning, and Gravity

magic. The lightning that originally just falls down was arbitrarily controlled using Gravity magic. To purposely make it form like a dragon from Hajime's story was something made by magic using Yue's sense. This thunder dragon was filled with gravity magic in the mouth's parts, that's why objects would be pulled toward it when its jaws were opened. This is why the demonic beasts looked like they voluntarily jumped toward it. Comparing its magic power, it was at the highest level even among high-ranked magic, that's why just by looking at Yue's expression one could see that was the gem of her pride.

And, the adventurers who looked dumbfoundedly at the scorched

ground began to regain their senses. Following that, they vigorously turned around to look at Hajime and his party, then started to make a commotion.

"Oioioioioi, what was that? What was, THAT!"

"A-A strange beast was... ... from the sky... ... from the sky... ... ah, it's a dream."

"Hehe, I, once we arrive at the town, I am going to marry."

"I know how shaken you're, but calm down. Remember that you don't have a lover, not even a girlfriend."

"It can be made by magic! It's not

even strange to make a strange beast like that! That's why I am not wrong!"

"Well, there is no magic related with the life and death cycle, you know? That's why this situation is abnormal, okay?"

"What!? Bastard, are you saying Yue-chan is abnormal!? Aan!?"

"Everyone, calm down! Listen, Yue-chan is a goddess, that'll explain everything!"

""""Indeed!""""

Maybe because Yue's magic left too much of an impact, the adventurers became a little broken. That couldn't be helped. After all, there

was no existing magic that could take the shape of living things. Furthermore, that was even impossible to be used by the magic-users that were employed by the country. It could be said the thunder dropping magic; "Thunder Hammer", was only usable by ultra first-class magic-users.

Inside the broken adventurers that shouted, "All hail Yue-sama!", something along that line was the sole sane person; the leader Galitima, who could only sigh after looking at his comrades and approached Hajime and his party.

"Haa, first of all, thanks. Thanks to Yue-chan, we were able to get through with zero damage."

"We are co-workers now. There's no need to thank us. Right?"

"... ... Nn, I am only doing my job."

"Haha, I see... ... so, that is. What was that just now?"

Galitima asked without being able to hide his bewilderment.

"... ... Original."

"O-Original? Do you mean a magic you created yourself? High-ranked magic, no, is that a highest-ranked magic?"

"... ... I didn't create it. It is a compound magic."

"Compound magic? But, what on

earth combines to make that..."

"... ... That's a secret"

"Kh... ... That's, well, it should be. No adventurers will simply reveal their trump card after all..."

Accompanied with a profound sigh, Galitima gave up the pursuit. He seemed to be sensitive to the tacit rule of veteran adventurers. While he shrugged his shoulders, he turned his attention to the broken comrades. "They would give birth to a new religion called the "Yue faith" if this keeps up, that's why Galitima must work hard", that's what Hajime thought as a man.

While receiving gazes from everyone in the merchant company

that were mixed with awe and respect, their group resumed their travels.

* * *

Since the time Yue removed the guts of every merchant company's people and adventurers, she didn't have anything to do at all, and their group finally arrived at the Neutral Commercial City; Fhuren.

There were six reception desks in Fhuren's eastern gate, the goods that were brought would be checked there. Hajime and his party were queueing in one of the rows. It would take a while until their turn.

On the carriage's roof, Mottou approached as Hajime laid down and rest his head on Yue's lap pillow, while being attended by Shia. It seemed there was something he wanted to say. Mottou looked toward Hajime with a somewhat amazed look, then Hajime lightly nodded and jumped down from the roof.

"Geez, you're so bold. Don't you notice the surroundings' eyes?"

Just as Mottou said, the surrounding eyes were the usual and familiar eyes that contained jealousy and envy toward Hajime, followed by eyes that are filled with wonder and hate toward Yue and Shia. In addition, currently the gazes that appraised Shia were

increasing. As expected of a big city's entrance gate. In the place where various men gathered, there were not only those who simply looked at Yue and Shia with dirty-minds but also those who looked at them as profit.

"Well, although they're annoying, I can't do anything about it. So, it's useless to worry about it"

Hajime said that while shrugging his shoulders and Mottou could only put on a wry smile.

"There'll be more trouble once you enter Fhuren. As expected, to sell her..."

Although Mottou tried to casually offer a trade for Shia, "Didn't that

conversation already end?", was what was expressed by Hajime's silence, and he could only raise a hand as a pose for giving up.

"You aren't calling me for such talk, right? What business do you want?"

"Well, it is something like that. I'm offering a trade negotiation. It is about the artifacts that you carry. Will you sell those? When we arrive at my company, under the notary witness, I'll pay the amount that can make someone live his whole life without working. Your artifacts, especially "Treasure Box" are something that merchants will desperately try to obtain after all."

Along with the word "desperately," Mottou's unsmiling eyes were

perfectly expressing "even if I have to kill." It was because "Treasure Box" would be able to solve the problem of cheaply and securely mass transportation goods, that always became a concern in merchants' heads. That's why it was understandable.

When he saw various things taken out from the "Treasure Box" while camping, Mottou's expression was as if someone who had wandered around for tens of days in the desert finally found an oasis while on the verge of dying. Because he persistently tried to negotiate, Hajime gave out slight bloodthirst and maybe because of his intuition as a merchant told him a warning, he withdrew dejectedly.

However, he was unable to give up after all. In front of Donner-Schlag, he was somehow able to approach Hajime and proposed another negotiation.

"I'll say it again and again, I won't sell any of it. Just give up."

"But, those artifacts are too useful for an individual to carry. Isn't it more reasonable for them to be used by someone who knows their value? If not, it'll be much more troublesome... ... for example, those girls wil—!?"

Mottou, for a little, took a peek toward Shia and Yue on the roof with a mad and threatening look and at that moment, gochih, something cold and hard was

pressed on his forehead. That was accompanied with a sublime bloodthirst. No one in their surroundings noticed it. One of the reasons was because they were in the shadow of the carriage and also because Hajime had pinpointed his bloodthirst toward him.

"That, can I think of that as a declaration of war?"

That was said in a quiet voice. However, that voice that was as cold as ice made Mottou stiffen and the eyes of Hajime that peered into his eyes were just like thick darkness. Mottou's whole body was drenched in cold sweat and he desperately let out his voice.

"Th-that's wrong. Somehow... ...

because, guh... ... I wouldn't... ... be able to hide about you... ... that's why, I said those... ... words. That was all... ... uh"

Just as Mottou said, Hajime didn't intend to seriously hide his artifacts and their ability. Because he had considered it a little to avoid troublesome things, there was the case of Yue's chant, but if it was reversed, if it was more than "a little," he didn't intend to hide it. Hajime had decided "to not hold back" against this world. He would mow all of his enemies down. He had the resolution to do that.

"I see, let's just leave it at that."

Having said that, Hajime put away Donner and dispersed his

bloodthirst. Mottou crumbled on the spot. While drenched in sweat, he panted.

"Well, it's up to you on what you want to do. For example, even if you spread that to others, and those people took action, then I wouldn't care about it. However, if you became an enemy that tried to obstruct me... ... Do you think you can survive? I don't care if it involves the country or even the world. I'll just sink everything into a sea of blood."

"... ... Haa haa, indeed. It will be an unprofitable business..."

Although he was still pale-faced, Mottou who was capable of firmly replying, was an excellent

merchant. Even from the interactions with the other merchant company members, he seemed to be quite adored. Normally, it would be impossible for him to take such a firm posture even now. The things that charmed and drove him mad were Hajime's artifacts.

"Well, this time I'll overlook it. But, there won't be a next time, okay?"

"... ... For the love of god. It is me who has become senile. For me to kick the butt of a dragon in front of my eyes..."

"Kick the butt of a dragon" is a proverb of this world, it referred to the Ryuujin race and dragons. They boasted their defensive power as an

impregnable defense because of their whole body covered by scales, excluding their eyes and mouth, the butt hole that wasn't covered by scales was their only weak point. Because of their high defense, as they were deep-sleepers, they wouldn't awaken once they fell asleep, but they would wake up at once, once their butt that was their weak point received stimulus, and became enraged like raging fires. A long time ago, it was not known why that was done, but the fool was completely crushed. From that, it became the meaning of someone who is foolish enough to purposely disturb someone that was harmless as long as they weren't disturbed.

By the way, the Ryuujin race was assumed to have perished more

than 500 years ago. Although the reason was uncertain, these guys own a characteristic magic called "Dragon Form" that made them between the boundary of a person and demonic beast, there are various opinions such as they were turned into exclusion because of discrimination and they were weeded out by the gods as an incomplete race.

"Now that you mention it, Yue's magic from back then was imitating the dragon. Although I will apologize if that was truly a dragon, but it's good that no one knows anything about it. After all I also never heard anything about the Ryuujin race. Well, I think it'll be okay because it looks more like a snake than a dragon."

Mottou who somehow recovered, managed to stand up and he advised Hajime while tidying his clothes. He was a somewhat bold person. Although he was going to be killed just now, to be able to casually talk to Hajime meant his nerve wasn't average.

"Is that so?"

"Ee, they are incomplete beings between people and demonic beasts. Nevertheless, they are frighteningly strong. In addition, they are infidels who don't believe in any gods. That's why, I can only nod that they are an odd existence for the church's authoritarian."

"I see. Rather, you're completely

okay with it. Are you also one of those infidels?"

"I have a god I believe in, the one where the power is not held by "people". People are "customers" after all."

"... ... Somehow, I can relate with what you just said. Must be a born merchant, you that is. Having seen it, I can only nod at your recklessness."

Having said that, towards Hajime that fiddled with the ring on his hand, Mottou showed a mixed expression of apology and pride, truly a complex expression. His merchant-like attitude from just now could no longer be seen. Hajime's bloodthirst was like

having bathed in cold water for him.

"Although I have committed a blunder, if you have a demand, please come to my company. You're different from the usual adventurers after all. Because I want connections with such a peculiar person like you, I'll give you some discount."

"... ... Really, what a firm business spirit."

While being looked at by Hajime with an amazed glance, after saying, "Well then, please excuse me", Mottou turned his heels and returned to the front.

Yue and Shia, even now, no,

gathered even stronger gazes. If you chased Mottou's back, immediately there were merchant-like people who were talking while pointing at Yue and Shia. Although it was supposed to be a relaxing trip toward Fhuren, Hajime could only think that more troubles were waiting ahead.

Chapter 53: Adventurers Guild, Fhuren Branch

* * *

Neutral Commercial City Fhuren

20 meters in height, the wall enclosed one of the continent's Neutral Commercial Cities with a length of 200 kilometers. All kinds of businesses and keen competitions happened in this city every day, there were people who successfully realized their dreams, and there were also a lot of people who became penniless and left dejectedly. It could be said it was

the number one city in the continent with the amount of people that came to sightsee, and those who came for business.

Because it was so huge, Fhuren was divided into four areas. The Central Ward where the facilities related to various procedures in the city gathered, Sightseeing Ward where amusement facilities were concentrated, Craftsman Ward where weapons and armor, also various furnitures were sold directly, and Commercial Ward where all kinds of stores and businesses lined up. There was a main street that stretched to the east, west, south, and north from the Central Ward, it seemed to be common sense to have numerous stores the closer ones to the middle

part. The places that were far from the main street and central ward were places for black dealings, in other words, there were a lot of black market-like shops. In those areas, sometimes there were unexpected things appearing, and those who were accustomed to rough stuff like adventurers and mercenaries visit this place.

That story was something Hajime and his party heard while they were eating light meals in the cafe inside the adventurer's guild : Fhuren's branch. The one who told them was a woman whose job was a guide. Because this city was huge, there was a lot of demand for guides, so it became a special occupation with a social standing. Although there were a lot of guide stores, they all

got high ratings because they improved their services to gain more customers every day.

Hajime and his party came to the adventurer's guild with the application form that had received the seal of proof after separating from Mottou's merchant company. Following that, because they didn't know the location of the inns and shops, they tried to get the guidebook from the adventurer's guild, that's how they came to know about the guide's existence.

Currently, after they paid the woman guide who introduced herself as Rishee, they were hearing the basic information of this city while having light meals.

"That's why, it is recommended to search for an inn in Sightseeing Ward. Although there are inns in Central Ward, it has become a tendency for the workers to nap there, that's why there are less services compared to Sightseeing ward."

"I see, then we will obediently look for an inn in Sightseeing Ward. Where's the recommendation?"

"It depends on what Mr. Customer demands. There are various kinds of inns, after all."

"That's true. Okay, I won't complain as long as the meals are delicious and they have a bath. There is no need to consider the location. Also, a place with a clear accountability

should be good."

Rishee heard Hajime's requests with a smile. Toward the first two requests she nodded with "Un un", she seemed to have immediately listed all of the recommended inns inside of her mind. However, towards Hajime's next words, she could only let out "Nn?", while inclining her neck.

"Umm~, an accountable place?"

"Aa, for example, assume I was pulled into a fight where I was the obvious victim, so I don't want to take responsibility of the damage inside the inn. I want to stay at a good inn, and I have a lot of equipment, so it'll be a hassle to compensate that."

"Uu~m, I think you won't be involved that often, but..."

Hajime could only smile wryly toward the perplexed Rishee.

"Well, if it were ordinary people it'll be like that, but we stand out, after all. It seems a lot of loose guys will be at Sightseeing Ward, and merchants with firm spirits that will force their ways will likely appear. Well, in the end it's only "if possible". If that's too hard then there's no need to consider it."

Because of Hajime's words, Rishee looked at Yue and Shia who sat at Hajime's sides while focusing on eating their light meals. Then, she nodded in consent. Certainly, these

two beautiful girls stood out. Even now, they gathered considerable gazes from the surroundings. Especially Shia who came from the Rabbitman tribe. Although it's a crime to put a hand on other's slaves, it couldn't be said there would be no merchants that tried to persistently negotiate nor loose and reckless guys.

"Then, how about an inn with strict guards? There are lots of inns like that, and I can introduce you to a good one..."

"Aa, that's okay. However, the guys that are blinded by desires will sometimes appear. So, it should be considered first that I am going to physically persuade them because guards are not absolute."

"Ph-Physical persuasion... ... I see, that's why you asked for accountability."

Rishee completely understood Hajime's intent, so the words "if possible" Hajime said seemed to hurt her soul as a guide, then she accepted his requests and said, "Please leave it to me", with a motivated expression. Following that, she turned her gaze toward Yue and Shia, then asked for their demands. It was a point where she tried to answer every customers' needs as much as possible, surely this came from the guide store she belongs to.

"... ... A big bath is good, however for a mixed bath, reservations are

essential."

"Umm, I want one with a huge bed."

After thinking for a sec, Yue and Shia said each of their requests. Even though they were called requests, if Yue's term was combined with Shia's, she could see clearly their intentions. Having guessed that, Rishee said "I accept it, so please leave it to me", with an acknowledging and clarifying face, but her cheeks slightly reddened. Immediately, she alternated her glances between Hajime, Yue, and Shia and that resulted in her cheeks blushing further.

By the way, the men who hung around in the nearby tables were staring at Hajime as if saying "If

only a person can be killed by a stare!", but because he was already accustomed to it, Hajime just let it go through his head as usual.

From there, they heard the stories of the other wards, then Hajime and his party felt an unexpected strong gaze. It was especially aimed at Shia and Yue, it was the rudest of all, a sticky gaze that stuck to them. Because it was too late for Yue and Shia to mind that gaze, they could only knit their eyebrows because of the unpleasant stare.

Hajime tried to take a peek toward the source of the gaze and... ... there was a pig. With a fat body that easily surpassed 100 kilograms, an oily face, along with a pig snout and sticky blond-hair attached on its

head. If it were only its appearance, it could be seen wearing good clothing even from a distance. That pigman was the one who stared at Yue and Shia with eyes completely mudded with desire.

While Hajime thought, "It'll be a hassle", the pigman moved his body heavily and while shaking he quickly approached Hajime and his party. Apparently, there was no time for them to escape. Hajime never thought of running away, though.

Maybe because Rishee also noticed his unrest, or maybe because that pigman stood out, when the pigman arrived with an arrogant attitude, she forgot to smile and "Geh!", raised an indescribable voice in bad

taste.

The pigman soon arrived at the side of the table Hajime and his party were, then looked at Yue and Shia with a smile in his eyes, and when he saw Shia's collar he narrowed his eyes unpleasantly. Following that, he finally looked at Hajime, who he never looked at until now, and as if he finally noticed him, he showed a gesture and let out a one-sided demand with an arrogant attitude.

"O-Oi, brat. I-I'll give you a million ruta. H-Hand over that rabbit. That blonde too, I'll make her my concubine. C-Come with me."

Having said those words while slightly stuttering and coupled with

kii kii sounds, the pigman tried to touch Yue. It seemed Yue was already his inside his mind. At that moment, a violent killing intent poured down. The faces of people in the surrounding tables turned pale as they fell from their chairs, and they began to desperately back away from Hajime.

Well, the pigman who received the killing intent directly was... ... "Hii!?", let out a pathetic scream and fell on his butt, then he retreated while the place between his groins began to wet.

If Hajime let out his true killing intent, he might instantly lose consciousness, and because that'd be meaningless he put enough consideration into it.

"Yue, Shia, let's go. Let's change the location."

Because a dirty liquid leaked, Hajime stood from his seat then called Yue and Shia. Honestly, he actually wanted to immediately shoot him dead, but it'd raise a commotion if he killed him after all, and that'd make Hajime the assailant. The town's guards were not that naive to let go of a murder. Basically, as long as it's at the limit of a legitimate self-defense, Hajime thought of just half-killing him inside this city.

Rishee could only say, "Eh? Eh?", while blinking her eyes in confusion because Hajime and his party stood up from their seats. Rishee was fine

even though she was inside the range of Hajime's killing intent because he had simply excluded her from "Pressure's" targets. It was the reverse version of the pinpointed "Pressure" that he had used on Mottou to not let anyone notice him. It was the result of his training. It was natural for Rishee to be confused, that's because when she thought the pigman was being selfish, he suddenly fell on his bottom and began to leak from in between his groins.

By the way, the "Pressure" that affected the surroundings was done on purpose. His reason was to make the surrounding guys who gave him depressing looks comprehend him. "Don't try to touch them, okay?", something like that. Judging from

the surrounding guys' pale expressions, it seemed there was no need to give out more warnings.

But, immediately after he dispersed the "Pressure" and tried to leave the guild, a big man came to block Hajime and his party's route and stood like a Niou statue. He had a huge body with around 100 kilograms of weight in different ways than the pigman. His whole body was full of muscle with a longsword hanging on his waist, his appearance was like an experienced soldier's.

Maybe because he saw that huge figure, the pigman once again let out a shout coupled with kii kii sounds.

"Th-That's right, Leganid! Kill that shitty brat! H-He tried to kill me! Kill him slowly!"

"Young master, to kill him will be troublesome. Let's just half-kill him."

"Do it! I-I don't care, just do it! B-But, don't hurt the girls! Th-They're mine!"

"Roger. So, please splurge on my reward."

"I-I'll give you any number you want! Just do it already!"

Apparently, the giant called Leganid was hired by the pigman as his bodyguard. He was talking to the pigman without looking away from

Hajime, then he floated a satisfied smile when he heard about the promised reward. He thought nothing of Yue and Shia which was unusual. He didn't look at them and only grinned at the word reward.

"Ou, boy. Sorry. I'll half-kill you for the sake of my money. What, it's not like I'll kill you. Well, about those little misses... ... just give up on them."

Having said that, Leganid prepared his fists. He didn't use the longsword because this was indeed a place where it shouldn't be used. A commotion appeared in the surroundings when they heard Leganid's name.

"O-Oi, by Leganid, you mean that

"Black" Leganid?"

""Black Wind" Leganid!? Just why did he become such a fellow's bodyguard..."

"Isn't it for money? He is "Money Lover" Leganid, you know?"

Hajime was able to guess the identity of the huge man in front of him from the surrounding whispers. Although his class was not known, he was a "Black"-ranked adventurer, the third rank from above, so he was quite the big-wheel.

Fighting spirit emitted from Leganid. Hajime thought it wouldn't be a problem to half-kill him because it was legitimate self-

defense, and the moment he began to swing his fist, a voice came to restrain him from an unusual spot.

"... ... Hajime, wait."
" ? What is it, Yue?"

Before she answered Hajime's question, Yue, while dragging the nearby Shia, came between Hajime and Leganid. While Hajime and Leganid were dumbfounded by it, Yue replied as she looked ahead.

"... ... Let us take care of him"
"Eh? Yue-san, am I included?"

Yue ignored Shia's question. Having heard Yue's words, before Hajime could reply, Leganid bursted into laughter.

"Gah hahahaha, are you little misses my opponent? That's quite laughable. What? I'll forgive you if you become my opponent at nig- "... ... Shut up, thrash" kh!?"

Before Leganid could finish his indecent words, Yue cut his words and quickly use wind blade to attack and cut his cheek. Pusyu, a small sound was made, his blood came and dripped as is. It seemed to be a fairly deep cut. Leganid fell silent just as Yue commanded. Because Yue's magic was too fast, he completely couldn't react to it. In his mind, "Just when did she chant? Where is the magic circle?", as he desperately tried to analyze her while letting out cold sweat.

Hajime who didn't know what Yue

meant was currently looking at Shia who also didn't understand Yue's intention and the talk continued.

"... ... We'll show them that we're not princesses that can only be protected."

"Aa, I see. We are showing them we can make a painful retaliation."

"... ... That's right. Because we finally came here, I'll use that."

Having said that, Yue looked at Leganid with a more severe gaze and pointed at him.

"Well, I understand what you are trying to say. Certainly, if the princesses that they got are in truth fierce beasts, that should wake

them up. Fortunately, there are a lot of witnesses... ... Unn, isn't that good?"

"... ... Fierce beasts is too cruel."

Hajime agreed with Yue's words and backed away with a wry smile. After Yue confirmed that Hajime had backed away, she sent an eye signal to Shia at her side. Having read the signal, Shia reached for Doryukken that was hung on her back, then as if not feeling the weight, she rotated it once in her hand.

"Oioi, just what can the miss from the Rabbitman tribe do? Because there is my employer's request, will you just keep quiet?"

Without looking away from Yue, Leganid said that to Shia. However, Shia ignored Leganid's words and advised him back.

"The longsword on your waist. Shouldn't you draw it? Although I'm going to take it easy, won't it be dangerous to be bare-handed?"

"Hah, big words from Usagi-chan. Young master! Sorry, but forgive me for one or two scratches!"

Leganid didn't pay much attention to Shia and focused on Yue, while the pigman who was still nearby didn't give out any objections. Surely, he must've judged it'd be difficult to subdue Yue without hurting her. However, Leganid should have noticed it. If he

thought using common sense, he should feel the incompatibility of the cherished slave and the strength of the Rabbitman tribe that held the warhammer, he should've recognized the significance of them leaving him to her after he caught a glimpse of Hajime and Yue's ability himself.

Without anymore talk, Shia held Doryukken near her waist... ... and immediately dashed out. Then, she appeared in front of Leganid.

"Kh!?"
"Yaa"

While letting out an adorable voice, she changed into an overpowering manner and swung the super-heavy Sledgehammer, and it approached

Leganid's chest whose expression was dyed with astonishment. Immediately before getting a direct hit, Leganid was barely able to cross his arms to defend, but...

(Isn't it too heavy!?)

He couldn't do anything even though he had braced himself, so he jumped back to soften the impact, but her swing was too fast and made his action meaningless. As a result,

GUSHA!

Along with that sound, Leganid was blown away and his back crashed into the guild's wall. Along with a roaring sound, Leganid vomited all the air in his lungs and inside his

shaking point of view, he could see Shia's appearance as she lost her interest. Apparently, she thought he would be able to resist some more.

For a "Black"-ranked adventurer like himself, to be easily beaten by a girl of the Rabbitman tribe and the fact that she even lost her interest, Leganid could do nothing but laugh at himself. He revealed a smile that looked like a frown because of pain and tried to use his hands to stand up, but because of a sharp pain he collapsed as is. When he looked at the source of the sharp pain, he could see his crushed arm.

Fortunately, the one that was crushed was only his right hand, so he managed to stand up using the other arm while enduring the pain.

Although his vision was still swaying, he somehow managed to firmly step on the floor. Even if it was meaningless, if he hadn't immediately jumped back, he probably wouldn't be able to stand up.

However, it wasn't a good thing for him to stand up. Although Leganid managed to stand up partly because of his willpower, when he saw Yue's appearance which looked at him with cold ice-like eyes while her right hand was thrust out, he could only grumble inside his mind.

(Young master, I am sorry, it'll be too unprofitable...)

Immediately, for the first time in Leganid's life, he gained a valuable

and worst experience of "dancing in the air".

"Having been embraced by the wind, dance and scatter like a flower and be smashed "Wind Flower""

It was Yue's original number two, a compound magic using Gravity magic and the bullet of "Wind Burst", a magic that shot a cannonball of wind. By freely manipulating several cannonballs of wind, the cannonballs would always surround and "continue to fall" to crucify their target using the gravitational field. Following that, it was an unsophisticated magic where the target became a sandbag in the air as is when they were launched at the same time. By the

way, what happened was just like the chant described.

When the dance with an one-sided lead was over, Leganid, gusha, fell on the floor with an unpleasant sound and didn't even twitch. Actually, he already lost consciousness after several attacks, but although she knew that, Yue kept attacking him without mercy, she especially concentrated her aim at his crotch and that made the surrounding men cover their crotches. Toward the brutal and severe attacks, Hajime in the back could only say "Ow", with a shivering voice filled with pathos.

The two consecutive spectacles were over. They were followed by a silence that wrapped the guild's

interior. Not even one person tried to move, they could only stare at Hajime and his party. If one looked carefully, the people who seemed to be guild staff had tried to stop the fight, but after they arrived at the cafe, they were stunned when they tried to stretch their hands towards Hajime and his party. It seemed that spectacle even shocked them who had seen various kinds of adventurers.

While everyone was stunned, slowly the silence was broken. Hajime tsuka tsuka, began to walk. All gazes inside the guild focused on Hajime. Hajime's destination was... ... The pigman.

"Hii! S-Stay awaay! J-Just who do you think I am! I am Poom Ming!

You're defying Baron Ming!"

"... ... Apologize to all of that character's fans on Earth, you pig"

A character from Earth floated in Hajime's mind when he heard the pigman's name, that's why he deeply frowned and he grandly trampled the pigman's face that had fallen on his butt.

"Pugya!?"

He let out a pig-like scream as his face was sandwiched between the shoe sole and the floor, then mishimishi, his skull let out that sound that made him scream again out of fear. After that, because his voice was annoying, the more he screamed, the more the pressure

increased. His face became uglier, his eyes and nose were hidden by his cheeks's flesh. Before long, maybe because he noticed that the pain increased as he screamed, he began to keep quiet. Well, there was also the possibility that he merely lost the strength to scream.

"Oi, piggy. Don't you come into my sight again. Regardless if you are involved directly or indirectly... ... There won't be a next time."

Even though Poom was still being trampled by Hajime's shoe sole, he tried to nod desperately while trembling. Finally, he had lost the power to bluff. His heart was completely broken. However, Hajime was not that naive to let him go if it was only to this extent.

To not let it become "You forget the heat once it passes your throat," temporary fear was not enough. Because killing him was not a choice, instead, he was going to carve a fear that would be remembered forever.

Because of that, he raised his foot a little, then Hajime transmuted the sole into spikes and mightily trampled again.

"Gyaaaaaaaa!!"

The spikes pierced Poom's face and made numerous holes. In addition, one of his eyes were pierced and began to sprout a large amount of blood. Poom himself immediately fainted because of the pain. When Hajime moved his foot, what he saw

was a tragic... ... No, his original face was tragic in the first place so there wasn't much change, for now, Poom's blood-stained face was released.

Hajime, with a somehow refreshed expression, went toward Yue and Shia. Yue and Shia greeted Hajime with beautiful smiles. Following that, Hajime came to the side the guide; Rishee who was dumbfounded while smiling.

"Well then, Guide-san. Please take us to the place."

"Hahih! W-Well, that's, I, what can I say..."

Maybe because she felt the fear from Hajime's smile, Rishee was

flustered. Her expression was obviously saying she didn't want to be involved with them. At least, that was because Hajime and his party were abnormals. Hajime, who had somehow guessed that, thought finding a new guide after such a commotion would be a hassle, so he wouldn't let Rishee go. Having realized Hajime's intent, Yue and Shia stood at Rishee's sides. "Hiiin!", was the miserable scream that Rishee let out.

And, her saviours came, although it was too late, the guild staff came.

"Umm, I am sorry, but please cooperate to be questioned over there."

A male staff member informed

Hajime, and three members of the staff were approaching to surround Hajime and his party. However, they seemed rather stiff. Several others were going to see the condition of Poom and Leganid.

"Even if you ask me, that piggy was trying to snatch my companions, then losing his temper he tried to attack us when I refused him so I only returned that back to him. That's all, there's nothing more to explain. That guide and the surrounding guys and merchants are the witnesses. Especially, those guys on the nearby tables that seemed to have attentively listened to us, right?"

While Hajime said that, he glared at the surrounding men, his eyes were

saying, "You know what will happen to your neck if you lie to them, right?" and that made the men nod intensely many times.

"Although we know that, it is a problem that happened inside the guild, so we'll judge it fairly by hearing the complaints from both concerned parties... ... it is the rule that needs to be followed by adventurers..."

"Both concerned parties... ... Huh"

Hajime took a glance towards Poom and Leganid. It seemed they wouldn't wake up anytime soon. Although the staff members had called healers, they would only likely awaken after two, three days.

"Until they wake up, are you saying we'll wait for that? Aren't we the victims here? ... ... should I just carry him outside of this city and kill him?"

Hajime gave a blaming look toward the guild staff. Toward the typical claimer-like words, the male staff said, "Please don't glare at us like that, it is our job so we can't help it", with an expression that gave off a desperate feeling. Following that, when they heard the last line that Hajime whispered, they tried to stop him in a panic.

Hajime, although reluctant, approached Poom and Leganid to wake them up with a sharp pain only to be stopped by the staff and they argued, then suddenly, a

dignified voice came out.

"What is it? Just what on earth happened here?"

When you looked at the source, there was a slender, glasses wearing man who let out an intellectual atmosphere looking at Hajime and his party with strict eyes.

"Head of secretary Datt! You arrived at the right time! What happened was..."

The staff thought it was a fortunate event and called out toward the man called the head of secretary Datt. When Datt finished hearing the story from the staff, he turned a sharp gaze toward Hajime and his party.

Apparently, they still couldn't be freed.

Chapter 54: Branch Head's Request

* * *

The head of secretary; Datt, pushed his glasses up with his middle finger, and talked to Hajime with a composed tone.

"I've roughly heard the story. It looks like it isn't a lie that there are many witnesses. Although I think you're overdoing it... ... well, let's just say it's within a permissible range because they didn't die. For now, before they wake up and give their side of the story, I assume you'll be staying in Fhuren. So, I

want to verify your identities and your contact address... ... you won't object if it's just that, right?"

What's implied was, 'I won't concede more than this, you know?', so Hajime replied to the head of secretary Datt while shrugging his shoulders.

"Aa, I don't care. If that pig still tries to complain, then it's me who wants to be called. I'll try a more polite method of persuasion at that time."

Hajime didn't refuse him, then he presented his status plate to the still amazed Datt.

"Our contact address, well we still haven't decided where to stay... ... You can just ask that guide. We are

going to stay at the inn she recommends after all."

Because Hajime turned his gaze towards her, Rishee twitched then dropped her shoulders with a resigned look because she'd still be their guide.

"Fumu, that's okay... ... "Blue" huh. Even though the guy that lies there is "black"... ... how about the status plates of the ones over there?"

Even a little, Datt was surprised when he saw Hajime's status plate displaying the lowest rank of an adventurer; blue. However, because he heard it was the two women that defeated Leganid, he thought the girls were the stronger ones and asked Yue and Shia to submit their

status plates.

"Well, Yue and Shia... ... these girls lost their status plates and we still didn't ask for a reissue. Look, isn't that expensive?"

Hajime casually said that lie. Although there'd be no problem to let them see the pair's abnormal strength, if possible he wanted to avoid the details being known.

"But, even if I can't clarify their identities, it'll be preserved in the record, so if you frequently cause trouble inside the guild, you'll be blacklisted regardless of who's the culprit and victim. If possible, can you pay the guild for a replacement?"

From Datt's tone, it seemed it was necessary to verify their identities by all means. But, if they got the status plates, then the two's peculiar magic would surely be displayed in the skill column before they could conceal it. That, along with the magic from the Age of the Gods that'd surely be displayed. It would definitely cause a ruckus. Although it's possible for Hajime and his party to just mow down everyone who tries to harm them during the ruckus, they wouldn't be able to stay here any longer. Hajime thought about a lot of troubles that would somehow come. Having read his thoughts, Yue talked to Hajime.

"... ... Hajime, letter."

" ? Aa. That letter huh..."

Because of Yue's words, Hajime remembered that he had received a letter from Catherine of the Brook branch when they were about to leave Brook town. She said to show it to the one who managed the guild when they got into trouble in the guild, because it could help them. A mysterious letter.

If the letter was useless, according to the circumstances, Hajime considered to immediately leaving the city. Then he fished out the letter from his chest pocket and handed it to Datt. Because he only heard half of what Catherine had said, he didn't know the contents. That's why Hajime immediately regretted not checking the contents first.

"Although I don't know if it'll act as a substitute for our identification, I was told to hand this over to the one who manages the guild by an acquaintanced member of the guild staff when we got into trouble."

" ? An acquaintance in guild staff? ... ... Let me see."

From the quality of Hajime and his party's clothes, they didn't seem to have any problems with money, that's why Datt felt doubtful about his attitude that refused to replace the status plate, but they passed him a letter instead. When he opened it, he earnestly read it and floated a fish-like expression.

Following that, he turned to look at

the face of Hajime and his party and the letter many times while he repeatedly reading the letter's contents. From his figure that read the letter with wide opened eyes, he was trying to determine if the letter was genuine. Before long, Datt folded the letter again and carefully put it again inside the letter's envelope, then he turned his gaze towards Hajime and his party.

"If the letter is real it'll certainly serve as your identification... ...I cannot decide by myself if the sender is real. I'll confirm it with the branch head, so will you wait in another room? It won't take much time. I'll be back in ten, no, fifteen minutes."

Because Datt's response exceeded

his expectations, "Seriously, who on Earth is Catherine?", Hajime and his party were slightly taken aback

"Well, I don't mind if it's that much. I understand. We'll wait."

"Let the staff guide you. Well then, later."

Datt called the staff at the side and left a message to guide them to another room, then he immediately disappeared into the guild, taking the letter with him. The designated staff asked Hajime and his party to relocate. Hajime and his party began to walk accordingly while being perplexed, but with a voice filled with anticipation rang out.

"Umm~, what should I do?"

It was Rishee's. 'If you still have to talk with the guild, can you excuse me?', was what her eyes said. She obviously wanted to quickly separate from a seed of troubles, like Hajime and his party.

Hajime, with an expression as if it was natural, nodded and frankly replied.

"Wait for us... ... don't run away, kay? Aren't you a pro?"

"... ... Yes."

Rishee dropped her shoulders and moved towards a seat inside the cafe. Her back said that although it was unpleasant work, she already accepted it, and the atmosphere of

an upstanding member of society's pathos drifted in the air.

After Hajime and his party were guided into the reception room, exactly after ten minutes, a knock came from the door. Hajime only answered with a word, then the door was opened. What appeared were a sharp eyed male in the latter half of his thirties, with blonde hair that was made into a swept back hairstyle, and Datt, from before.

"Nice to meet you, I am Ilwa Chang, the head of the Adventurer's Guild – Fhuren branch. Hajime-kun, Yue-kun, and Shia-kun... ... is it okay to call you that?"

After a simple introduction, the branch head; Ilwa confirmed the

names of Hajime and his party and requested a handshake. Hajime returned the handshake while replying to him.

"Aa, we don't mind. Our names, is it from the letter?"

"Just as you said. It was written in sensei's letter. She seems to favor... ... paid you a lot of attention. Your future is promising, but because you have a predisposition for trouble, if possible she wants us to take care of you, is the letter's content."

"Predisposition for trouble... ... Huh. Trouble certainly continued to happen in Brook. Well, that's okay. So, essentially will that serve as our identification? Or are there other

questions?"

"Aa, Sensei already wrote everything here so there's no need to question you further. She certainly has the eyes to discern people's characters. She even purposely wrote this letter, so I'll let this letter be your identification."

Apparently, Catherine's letter was really useful and let them meet the one who managed the guild. He seems to have close ties with Catherine, to have even called her "sensei". Shia, who sat next to Hajime, had been especially helped by Catherine, so she was interested in the story and timidly talk to Ilwa.

"That's~, who is Catherine-san actually?"

"Nn? Didn't you hear from the person herself? She was the Guild Master's head of secretary in the guild's headquarters located in the Imperial Capital. Afterwards, she became the one in charge of training everyone related to guild management. Currently, of the 5 branch heads sent to each town, 60% are her pupils. I am also one of them, so I can't go against her. Because of her beauty and pleasant character, at the time, she was a madonna-like existence to us, in certain ways she was also an adored big-sister-like existence. Afterwards, she married and transferred to the guild branch of Brook town. She said she wanted to raise her children in the country. Her marriage announcement was like a

bolt from the blue. It became stormy after that. If you ask where, the guild in the Imperial Capital that is."

"Haa~ she really is an amazing person~"

"... ... Catherine's amazing."

"Although I had thought she wasn't an ordinary person... ... I never thought she was such a central figure. Rather, even though she was so popular... ... Currently... ... No, it's better if I stop here."

Hajime and his party came to admire her when they learned of Catherine's true colors. It seemed they had always imagined her as an important person. Moreover,

Hajime was somewhat looking at the distance, remembering the cruelty of time.

"Well, that's that, if there are no more questions, is it okay for us to go?"

Originally, they came here only to verify their identity, so Hajime tried to confirm with Ilwa if it was over because staying any longer would be meaningless. However, Ilwa's eyes shone and said, "Can you wait for a little longer?", as he tried to stop Hajime and his party. It somehow gave them a bad premonition.

Ilwa urged Datt that stood next to him and an application form was presented in front of Hajime and

his party.

"Actually, I've expectations for your help, I want you to accept one request."

"I refuse."

The moment Ilwa requested something of them, Hajime tried to decline as he stood up from his seat. Although Yue and Shia also followed after him, they stopped their feet when Ilwa spoke his next lines.

"Fumu, isn't it fine to at least hear the story for now? If you listen, I think I'll turn a blind eye to this affair..."

"... ..."

What was implied was, "If you won't hear me out, I'll make you go through the troublesome procedures for this affair, you know?", something like that. Using the testimonies from the surrounding people, even though Hajime and his party weren't guilty of what was done to Poom and Leganid, what they have done was excessive self-defense. So according to the regular procedures, the guild would judge them fairly by hearing both concerned parties and this procedure would take quite some time. As a result, even if Hajime and his party weren't in the wrong, on the other hand, they would spend time like fools until the necessary procedures were finished and the decision came. Also, if they escaped

from these procedures, they'd likely be black-listed. In the future, that'd be troublesome because they wouldn't be able to use the town's guild facilities.

Hajime stared at Ilwa for a while, then he didn't say "I'll accept the request", but "I'll hear the story", because he thought it'd be okay to at least hear him out to avoid the trouble, then he sat on the seat.

"It looks like you'll listen to it. Thank you."

"... ... as expected of a big city's guild branch head. You've a good character."

"Not as good as you though. Well then, the contents of the request is

written here, to search for a missing person. A party of adventurers that accepted a request to investigate the northern mountain range area have not returned, so the family of one of the adventurers put up a missing person search request, something along those lines."

Ilwa's story if summarized, went something like this.

Recently, there were sightings of groups of demonic beasts in the northern mountain range area, which is why the guild made the investigation request. The northern mountain range area is a mountain that, once crossed, would lead you to an uncivilized area. Although not as strong as the demonic beasts inside the Great Dungeons, there

are strong demonic beasts that only high-ranked adventurers could handle. It just that, besides the original members of the party that accepted the request, there was another member that tried to forcefully accompany them. By some happenstance, he eventually became a temporary member of the party.

This person was the third son of Count Kudeta; Will Kudeta. Count Kudeta always secretly made someone follow his son that had a tendency to rush out as an adventurer, just like a runaway. But because of this investigation request, the contact with his employer was lost, as it was unusual he was perplexed and put up a search request.

"Although the count had already tried to use his family's power to form a search party, too many problems kept popping up, which is why he put up the search request to the guild. Well, it was just put up yesterday. Because the missing party was considerably skilled, if they couldn't handle this, it'd just result in another disaster if accepted by regular Adventurers. That's why the big-guns should be the one to accept it. But unfortunately, such adventurers are all out on missions. Therefore, for you to come here with such timing, I want you to accept this request."

"From your statement, we don't have the required strength, so wouldn't that be useless?

Unfortunately, I am a "Blue"-rank, you know?"

What Hajime implied was they wouldn't accept it because they didn't have the required strength.

"Didn't you instant-kill a "Black" called Leganid? Also... ... for someone who easily searched around inside the Raisen Grand Canyon, do I need to say more ?"

" ! How did... ... the letter? But, I didn't say anything..."

No one had heard the story of Hajime and his party searching around the Raisen Grand Canyon. Therefore, unless it was from the letter, there was no way for Ilwa to know about that. But, he was

doubtful about how Catherine learn of this. While Hajime puzzled it over in his head, Shia timidly raised her hand.

Hajime turned towards Shia with a suspicious look.

"What is it, Shia?"

"U~mm, I inadvertently told her when we talked... ... Teehee?"

"... ... I'll punish you later."

" !? Y-Yue-san said it too!"

"... ... Shia, you traitor."

"I'll punish both of you later."

Apparently, the culprits were Yue

and Shia. Hajime declared to punish them, and the two were passively drenched in cold sweat. Looking at their appearances with a wry smile, Ilwa continued his talk.

"Although the probability of them being alive is low, it's not zero. Because the Count is my friend, I want you to begin as soon as possible. What do you think? There's no one but you here. Will you accept it?"

Ilwa's attitude was as if he was begging him, the guild was simply responsible for the commission, but he included more emotion in this. For him to be a friend of the Count, it's possible he's acquainted with the missing Will. So he personally felt anxious for his safety.

"Even if you say that, we already have a destination for our journey. We are only here because it's along the way. We won't go to the northern mountain range area. So, allow me to refuse."

Hajime, even though it's a matter of the life and death for a noble's third son, unhesitantly refused him. However, maybe he foresaw that, Ilwa immediately proposed a reward faster than Hajime could stand up from his seat.

"I can increase the reward, you know? Although the reward listed in the application is in the form of cash, let me add more appeal to you.. I'll promote your guild rank. If it's your abilities then becoming

"Black" is okay."

"Well, I don't care about money and rank, that's why..."

"Then, in the future, when you have some trouble related to the guild, I can be your support, how is that? To have the guild head of Fhuren branch's support, you'll have influence inside the guild you can brag about, you know? You and trouble are pretty close after all. So, isn't it good as a reward?"

"That's a big treat for me. Aren't you putting in too much effort for a friend's son?"

Toward Hajime's words, Ilwa's expression crumbled. It became an expression full of regret.

"He... ... Will accepted the request after I recommended it. I was also the one who passed the talk about the investigation request to the party. Even if you said there'd be an accident in the investigation, I thought there'd be no problem if he was with a party that had the required strength. I meant no harm. Will was not suited to be a noble, and he had yearned to be an adventurer for the longest time... ... but, he didn't have the disposition. Therefore, if he were with strong adventurers, then he could go to dangerous places. I only wanted him to realize that it was impossible for him to be an adventurer. He was already attached to me at a young age.... ... that's why, even though I wanted

him to give up after this request..."

While he heard Ilwa's monologue, Hajime thought about it slightly. It seemed there was a thicker relationship between Ilwa and Will than Hajime thought. Although he had said that with a clarifying face, internally, Ilwa must be clinging to the last straw of hope. Will's odds of survival would become closer to zero as time passed. Having proposed such unreasonable rewards showed that Ilwa was in a hurry.

Hajime was also fed up with making excuses for Yue and Shia's identification every time they came near a town. That's why it'd be convenient to use this person's name in order to access a town's

facilities from now on. Moreover, he had zero intention of catering to the Church of Saints or the Kingdom, and someday he might be labelled as a heretic. If that happens, it'd become extremely difficult for them to stay inside a town. That's why it was a nice thing to have a personal connection that could clear that hurdle.

So, Hajime thought that if he wanted the support of a big city guild's branch head, in this case, they must tell him their circumstances and forbid him to speak of it, so they could use him in times of inconvenience. Because he seemed extremely intimate with that Will person, if they brought him back alive, Ilwa couldn't be ungrateful to them.

"Although there's no need to think about it because you already said that much... ... I have conditions."

"Conditions?"

"Aa, they are not something difficult. I want you to give status plates to Yue and Shia. After that, promise me you won't tell anyone about what's written there. Furthermore, even if it isn't related to the guild, I will use all of your connections, for our convenience. These two."

"That's too..."

"If you can't, then pretend we never talked about this. We are going."

Because of Hajime who tried to stand up from his seat, Ilwa and Datt displayed expressions filled with impatience and agony. Although the first condition was not a problem, his second condition essentially meant that he wanted the Fhuren guild branch's head to be the limbs of a single adventurer. Because he had his own responsibilities, he couldn't immediately accept it.

"Can I ask why you demand that?"

"There's no need to be that negative. They aren't unreasonable demands, you know? It's just that our existences are peculiar, that's why when marked by the church... ... No, from now on, I am sure we'll be marked, so at that time I only

want to use you to make it easier for us. It's also good if you just become our allies in times of trouble. For example, not refusing us to use the facilities when we become wanted..."

"Is it certain you'll become wanted people? Fumu, personally, your secrets make me anxious. Although Catherine-sensei said you're not bad people... ... now that you mention it, Shia-kun over there has marvelous physical strength, and although I didn't see it, from the report Yue-kun has conjured a never before seen magic spell... ... your secrets must be along those lines... ... following that, you said that you'll sooner or later be marked by the church... ... you also didn't try to hide it, and it looks like

you are already prepared for that... ... it'll surely be hard to move into towns when that happens... ... that's why to make it easier for you..."

As expected of a big city's guild branch head. He quickly thought inside his head. Ilwa thought about it for a while, then he matched his gaze to Hajime's having decided what to do.

"I absolutely can't support you when you ask for help for doing a crime because of ethics. So, I'll hear the details of your request first, only then I'll judge what to do. But, I promise I'll at least be your ally... ... I can't concede more than this. What do you think?"

"Well, if it's like... ... I'll accept it.

Also, it's okay for the reward to be given after the request is finished. I'll bring back the young master dead or alive, is that okay?"

For Hajime, it was his first priority to obtain the status plates for Yue and Shia. It's unnatural for them to not have status plates because it's somehow always being requested to be shown, this was his first reason, and ultimately to make an excuse every time they came to a town was troublesome.

The only problem was that the person who prepared the status plates at the beginning would make a commotion, so he wanted to avoid it, but Ilwa's existence solved this problem. However, even if he made a verbal promise as the condition,

there are still doubts. Sooner or later, the peculiarity of Hajime and his party might come to light, so it was not preferable because he might change sides immediately. That's why Hajime said to give the status plates as a reward after the request was completed. Whatever Will's shape was, Hajime would gain the answer from his afflicted heart, and he could calculate if Ilwa was good or not.

Ilwa was also able to guess Hajime's intentions. With a bitter smile, he felt relieved finding someone who could accept the search request.

"Truthfully, although your secrets make me anxious... ... that's, I'll wait for you to finish the request. Just as Hajime-kun said, no matter what

shape he is in, I want you to find traces of Will and the other... ... Hajime-kun, Yue-kun, and Shia-kun... ... Please take care of it."

Lastly, Ilwa looked at Hajime and his party with earnest eyes, then bowed his head. A big city guild branch's head bowing his head to adventurers. It wasn't something usual. It was because he was Catherine's pupil that his goodness as a person oozed out.

Having seen Ilwa's appearance, Hajime and his party stood up and without any eagerness, they lightly answered him.

"Kay."

"... ... Nn."

"Yes."

Afterwards, they were given the downpayment, and a letter of introduction for the lakeside town at the foot of the mountain range area. They also received information about the investigation request that was given to the adventurers, and finally Hajime and his party left the room. Batan, the door was closed with a slam. Ilwa stared at the door for a while, then, "Fuu~", let out a big sigh. Inside the room, no one spoke a word, then Datt anxiously spoke to Ilwa.

"Branch head... ... Is that okay? Such rewards are..."

"... ... Will's life hangs in their

hands. I can't ask anyone besides them. So, it can't be helped. Furthermore, they already agreed that I can judge first whether to lend them my power or not. There'll be no problem. Also, their secrets..."

"What's displayed in the status plates will be an "inconvenience", is it..."

"Fumu, Datt-kun. Did you know? Herrlich kingdom's Hero party, it seems all of them have unexpected statuses, you know?"

Datt opened his narrowed eyes wide because of Ilwa's sudden story.

" ! Branch head, the summoned ones... ... you mean one of them is "God's Apostle"? But, from their

tone it seems they are opposing the church, isn't the Hero's party managed by the Church of Saints?"

"Aa, it's just as you said. But... ... around four months ago, it seems one of them died inside the Orcus dungeon. He fell into the Abyss along with a demonic beast."

"... ... don't tell me, that person's still alive? If you said four months ago, isn't the Hero's party still full of novices? Although I don't know what it's like at the bottom of Orcus, to survive that..."

Datt couldn't believe it as he shook his head, and denied Ilwa's guess. However, Ilwa who somehow gave out an interested expression and once again glanced at the door from

which Hajime and his party had left.

"That is true. But, if that's so... ... there must be a reason why he didn't rejoin with his companions and even went on a journey, right? Just what did he see in the bottom of the darkness, just what did he obtain?"

"Just what... ... that is huh..."

"Aa, no matter what it is, surely, it's something worth making him decide to oppose the church. To put it frankly, he's determined to even oppose the world."

"The world..."

"For me, I want to make

connections with such a peculiar man by all means. For example, even if they are chased by the church and the kingdom, right. Rather, Sensei might have guessed that, that's why she purposely gave them this letter."

"Branch head... ... please be sure to know when to quit, okay?"

"Of course I will."

Towards the story on such a large scale, Datt became dizzy, even so, as Ilwa's head of secretary, he didn't forget to advise him. However, Ilwa was deeply in thought when he heard Datt's advice only replied in half absent-mindedness.

Chapter 55: Reunion in the Lakeside Town

* * *

In the middle of the vast plain was a highway stretching far to the North. Although it was called a highway, it was actually just ground without weeds since it had been treaded on so many times, thus it naturally became a road. Since there's no such thing as a suspension in carriages of this world, the carriage crew would surely have sore butts by the time they reached their destination.

Suddenly, a shadow ran through the uneven road at an unbelievable speed. On its black body were two wheels advancing forward on the uneven road, carrying silhouettes of three people.

They are Hajime, Yue, and Shia. They moved on the highway at a speed incomparable to the time when they were at the bottom of the Raisen Grand Canyon. It might be more than 80km/h. Because there was nothing to obstruct his magic, the magic-driven two-wheeler's original specs could be displayed. Their seating order was just as usual: Yue between Hajime's arms, and Shia at his back. Shia's rabbit ears were pata pata, fluttering in the wind.

Warm sunlight poured down because of the good weather, and with Yue using her magic to adjust the wind pressure, it could be said it was good weather for touring. In fact, Yue and Shia were feeling the warm sunlight and comfortable wind with their entire bodies, closing their eyes because it felt pleasant.

"Hau~, it's niice~, Yue-saa~n. We should exchange places when we retuurn~"

"... ... That won't do. This is my spot."

"Eh~, don't say that, let us change our places~, it's nice in the back~"

Shia demanded to Yue that they

exchange their seats with a slackened and stretched tone. With an unpleasant face, Hajime looked at Shia's relaxed face over his shoulder and answered in Yue's stead.

"You know, you can't sit in front, right? Also, you'll only obstruct me. Especially those rabbit ears. They'll hit my eyes when the wind blows."

"Ah~, that's riight~"

"... ... It's not good, she's almost asleep."

Apparently, Shia was half-asleep because of how comfortable it was. She laid her head on Hajime's shoulder with all of her weight. She

was also half-asleep when she was talking to Yue before.

"Well, with this pace we only need one day. I'll go non-stop, so let's rest when it's time to rest."

Just as Hajime had said, Hajime and his party were going to a town only one day away; the town closest to the northern mountain range area where Will's party undertook the investigation request. They had advanced as is without taking a break, so they would probably arrive at sunset and start searching after a night's stay in town. The reason they were in a hurry was, of course, the fact that as more time passed, Will's party's odds of survival decreased. But because Hajime was being proactive for

another person's sake, Yue was glancing upward with doubt on her face.

Hajime let out a wry smile when he saw Yue adorably incline her neck in between his arms.

"... ... Proactive?"

"Aa, it's better if he's alive. If it's like that, he will truly be grateful. After all, problems from the Kingdom and Church are waiting ahead of us. So, isn't it better to have more support? I don't want to take care of them one by one, after all."

"... ... I see."

In fact, he didn't know what could

possibly be done with Ilwa's support. If anything, the possibility of him being a type of useless support was bigger. But, if it could be acquired with little work, then the work might not be regrettable.

"I have also heard that our destination, the lakeside town, has plenty of rivers. That's why the town's outskirts are the continent's number one rice-producing area."

"... ... Rice farm?"

"Ou, in other words it's the rice. Rice. It's the staple food of my hometown, Japan. I haven't eaten it even once since I came here. So, although I don't know if it is the same thing or not, I want to hurry to eat it."

"... ... Nn, I also want to eat it... ... The town's name?"

Hajime looked far into the distance while remembering rice dishes. Looking at the Hajime with a content expression plastered across his face, Yue hadn't yet actually heard of the town's name and asked him. "Hah", Hajime was startled, he even was a little embarrassed when he noticed Yue's gaze. He then replied with a somewhat loud voice to hide his embarrassment.

"It's the Lakeside Town called Ul."

* * *

"Haa, there's no clue today, too... Shimizu-kun, where on earth did you go..."

With her shoulders dropping dejectedly, the person who was walking through Ul's main street was one of the summoned ones; the teacher, Hatayama Aiko. Her usual cheerfulness was gone. Currently, she was tortured with anxiety and worry, while a gloomy atmosphere hung around her. Somehow the main street's color, and even the streetlights were dimmer than usual.

"Aiko, don't be so disappointed. We still don't know anything. It's enough to just think he is safe. What can you do if you don't even believe."

"That's right, Ai-chan-sensei. Shimizu-kun's room didn't seem to be attacked. So isn't the probability of him going out on his own be higher? Please stop thinking of just bad things."

Because Aiko was low-spirited, the commander of Aiko's exclusive bodyguards; David, and her student; Yuka, called out to her. In her surroundings were the familiar Knights and students. They were also severely worried about Aiko and tried to talk to her.

One of the classmates, Shimizu Yukitoshi had disappeared for a little over two weeks. Aiko and the others had tried to search for him, leaving no stone unturned. However, his whereabouts were still

unknown. There had been no sightings in this town, so they had sent messengers to the other towns and villages in the vicinity, but in the end their efforts were still in vain.

Although, at first they thought he was involved in an accident, Shimizu's room was clean. Shimizu himself was a "Dark Magician," a class that possessed high aptitude toward dark magic. He also had high aptitude in other magic systems, that was why he couldn't be done in by the neighborhood thugs. A lot of them thought he left voluntarily.

Moreover, Shimizu was an obedient indoor type who had low sociability. Even among the classmates he

didn't have an especially close friend. It was also surprising that he wanted to be Ai-chan's bodyguard. Because of that, other than Aiko, the students were sure of his safety. They were more concerned about Aiko, who became more low-spirited as the days passed. There was no need to say how worried her bodyguard Knights were.

Incidentally, they had reported it to the Kingdom and Church, and it seemed like a search party they had organized was coming. Shimizu was a summoned one with talent in magic, unlike the episode with Hajime in which the top management didn't even take an optimistic view. The search party would arrive in another two to three days.

Because words of concern came one after another, Aiko mentally hit herself. Whether he was involved in an incident or voluntarily disappeared, didn't matter, it didn't change the fact that it worried her. However, she must put it aside for now. Now her duty was to cheer up the other students at her side. That's why, "I am these children's teacher!". Aiko took a deep breath then slapped her cheeks with her hands to recover her spirit.

"Everyone, I am sorry for worrying you. It's just as you said. Nothing would be solved by brooding over it. Shimizu is an excellent magic-user. He'll surely be okay. Now, let us believe he is safe. Now, for today's dinner! Let's eat our fill and prepare

for tomorrow!"

Although they knew she was overdoing it, the students obediently replied to her with a shout "Ye~s", as they cheered up. The Knights were also pleased with her appearance.

KARANh KARANh

When that sound rang out, the door of the inn Aiko and the others were staying at opened. It was the number one inn in Ul. Its name was "Water Fairy Inn". A long time ago, a pair of husband and wife fairies stayed in Uldeia Lake, and that was the origin of its name. Uldeia Lake was the lake boasted as the largest in the continent, and located on the outskirts of Ul town. Its size was

about four times that of Lake Biwa in Japan.

The first floor of "Water Fairy Inn" was a restaurant. It served dishes that were also Ul's specialty products. The interior was calming, there were tables and bar counter that gave out a dignified atmosphere. Their ornaments were made with detail in mind, but did not stand out. Moreover, there was a modest chandelier on the ceiling, and flowers were arranged to add onto the calm atmosphere. It made one remembered the words "well-established", an inn where one could feel its history.

In the beginning, Aiko and her students weren't able to calm down because the inn was too high-class.

It was impossible for Aiko and her student to stay at an ordinary inn because of their reputation, since people began to called them "God's Apostles" and "Goddess of Good Harvest". After some persuasion from the Knights, they agreed to stay at this place while they were in Ul.

In fact, they had spent time in one of the luxurious rooms of the Royal Palace, so Aiko and her students had gradually become accustomed to it. Now the inn had became a place where they could truly relax. For Aiko and the others who came back exhausted from farmland improvement and in search of Shimizu, this inn's dishes were their only daily enjoyment.

All of them were seated in VIP seats in the innermost section of the inn, as they enjoyed today's dinner.

"Aa, it's always delicious~ I never thought I'd be able to eat curry in this other world."

"Well, it looks like stew though... ... No, is it white curry?"

"No, there is also the bowl of rice topped with tempura, remember? Even the sauce is superb, right? Won't Japan lose?"

"That, isn't it because Tamai-kun only eats the premade ones? It's not good to compare it with Hokaben's."

"Well, I'll choose the fried rice-like

things. So, let's stop this."

The student's tension was raised every night because of the dishes closely resembled those from Earth. Although there were slight differences in appearance and taste, the concept itself closely resembled their counterparts on earth. The abundance of ingredient was one of the reasons that increased the quality of Ul town's dishes. Other than the rice, there were fishes from Uldeia Lake, in addition to herbs and spices from the mountain range area.

While Aiko and the others ate the delicious dishes happily, a splendidly mustachioed male of around 60 years of age, approached them with a smile.

"Everyone, what do you think of today's meal? If there is something you want to say, please tell us without any reserve."

"Ah, Owner-san."

The one who talked to Aiko and the others was the owner of the "Water Fairy Inn"; Foss Selo. He straightened his back, his eyes were gently narrowed, and gray hairs were mixed on his swept-back hair. He was a man who suited the calm atmosphere of the inn.

"No, today is also delicious. It heals us everyday."

When Aiko replied with smile, Foss gladly said, "Thanks for the

compliment", and smiled. But, in the next moment, his expression was clouded as though he wanted to apologize. It was an expression unbecoming of Foss who always smiled gently. Wondering what had happened, everyone stopped eating and focused on Foss.

"Actually, although it's regrettable... I can only serve this much for the dishes that uses spices today."

"Eh!? You mean, we can't eat Nilshisseer (the version of curry in this other world.)?"

Sonobe Yuka, who favored the curry, was shocked and tried to ask again.

"Yes, I am sorry. Anyway, no matter

how many ingredients were used... it would be enough if it were the usual... However, there's an unrest in the northern mountain range this month, so the number of people going to harvest the ingredients have sharply declined. Even a few days ago, a party of Adventurers who came to investigate the situation had gone missing. Thus, even more people don't want to go there. It became a situation where this store doesn't know when the goods will arrive."

"Umm... What do you mean by unrest?"

"Something like the sightings of groups of demonic beasts... It's a comparatively safe place as long as you don't go into the mountains of

the northern mountain range. Although there seems to be strong demonic beasts inside the mountain, they never come near on purpose. However, there were sightings of groups of demonic beasts in the mountain where there shouldn't have been any."

"That's truly worrisome..."

Aiko frowned. The others were somewhat depressed and mutually looked at each other. Foss said with an apologetic expression, "It isn't the right topic to talk while eating, huh?", then he continued to speak with a bright tone to recover the atmosphere.

"However, that disaster should be solved soon."

"What do you mean?"

"Actually, today there were new customers who just arrived before the sunset. It seems they are going to the northern mountain range in order to search for the Adventurers who had gone missing. They were appointed by the Branch Head of Fhuren guild, so it looks like they are some serious big-guns. They might be able to determine the cause of this disaster."

Although Aiko and her students were still seated, the bodyguard Knights commanded by David and currently eating with them let out "Hou", with a half admiration-filled and half-interested tone. Even among the guild's staff members,

the Head of Fhuren branch was considered first class. For someone to be appointed to accept a request from that Branch Head meant that they were capable of clearing something only powerful people could accomplish. Their curiosity was aroused because they wanted to fight in the same battle as such people. Inside the Knights' heads, they were listed the famous "Gold" class Adventurers.

Aiko and her students were looking at the unusual chatter of David and the Knights, then they began to hear voices from the stair connected to second floor. They were the voices of a boy and two girls. It seemed like one of the girls was complaining to the boy. It was Foss who reacted to those voices.

"Oya, speak of the devils. It is them, Mr. Knights. If you want to talk to them, please do it now because they are going to leave tomorrow morning."

"I see, I understand. But, those are fairly young voices. Are there any "Gold" class that young?"

David and the Knights had already memorized the famous "Gold" class in their minds, but because there was no one with such young voices. Some of them looked at each other with perplexed expressions.

While they were in a state of confusion, the trio were approaching while talking.

The seats where Aiko and the others sat were the innermost seats enclosed by walls on three sides. It was a place where they could look anywhere inside the restaurant. For now, it was made into a private room with the use of the curtain. Needless to say, inside was the conspicuous Aiko's party, was Aiko; the one hailed as the "Goddess of Good Harvest", which made them even more conspicuous. It was why they often used the curtain whenever they ate their meals. Even today, they closed the curtain so they wouldn't be seen.

From the other side of the curtain, they could hear the conversation of a boy and two girls.

"Mou, how many times I must say it

until you understand. Please stop leaving me alone and create a world with just the two of you in it. It makes me feel really, really lonely. Did you hear me? "Hajime"-san."

"I heard, I heard you. Just stay in another room if you don't want to see it."

"Nmah! Did you hear what he just said, Yue-san? "Hajime"-san just said something coldhearted."

"..."Hajime" ...Bad!"

"Yes, yes."

Within their conversation, the name the girls said instantly rattled Aiko's heart. What did the girls just say? What was the boy called? This

boy's voice... isn't it similar to "that boy"?, were the question that immediately floated into Aiko's mind. She stiffened as though something had tied her down, so she could only stare at the curtain.

The same thing happened to Sonobe Yuka and other students by her side. In their minds, thoughts of a certain boy who had disappeared into the abyss four months ago resurfaced. He was a boy who the classmates strongly believed to have "died in this other world". A boy they wanted to forget, a boy who stood out for better or for worse.

Because of the abnormal expression on Aiko's and her students' faces, Foss and the Knights tried calling

out to them with dumbfounded gazes, but no one reacted. The Knights were wondering what on earth had happened as they looked at their faces. Then, Aiko blurted out a name.

"...Nagumo-kun?"

Because of the word she unconsciously let out, her body which had stiffened because of the unbelievable situation had regained its freedom. Aiko immediately stood up and her chair fell to the ground. She then pulled the curtain opened, so hard it might tear.

SHAAAA!!

Because of the unexpected loud sound that came from when the

curtain was pulled, boy and two girls trio were only able to look with stupefied expressions.

Aiko shouted without confirming who the other person was. It was the name of her important student.

"Nagumo-kun!"

"Ah? ..... Sensei?"

In front of her, with his eye wide open in surprise, was an eyepatched, white-haired boy. He looked completely different from the Nagumo Hajime in her memory. Not only his appearance, his atmosphere was also completely different. Nagumo Hajime Aiko knew was a boy who always daydreaming, gentle, and quiet.

Actually, Aiko admitted that a wry smile fit him, but it was her secret. However, the boy in front of her eyes had sharp eyes, clad with an unapproachable atmosphere. He was too different from her memory. If she passed by him inside the town, she was sure she wouldn't recognized the boy in front of her as Nagumo Hajime.

But if she looked carefully, his voice and face were the same as the one inside her memory. Above all... it was how the boy in front of her called her. That's right, it was "sensei". Aiko was convinced. Although his look and atmosphere had greatly changed, the boy in front of her was certainly her own student, "Nagumo Hajime"!

"Nagumo-kun... You're Nagumo-kun, right? You're alive... You really are alive..."

"No, you got wrong person. Bye."

"He?"

To meet the student who was thought to be dead, was a miracle. Being deeply moved, her tear glands loosened, and Aiko eyes became teary. "Where was he until now? What on earth happened? I am truly glad that you were safe." Were only some of the many things she wanted to say, but couldn't. Even so, the reply to her desperate words was a completely unexpected answer.

She unconsciously let out a stupid

voice, and Aiko's tears were also withdrawn. She could only blankly stare at Hajime who had begun to suta suta, walk towards the exit. 'HAH', she returned to her senses, and panicky ran after him while gripping onto his wrist.

"Please wait a second? Aren't you Nagumo-kun? Didn't you just call sensei sensei? Just how is that the wrong person."

"No, you heard it wrong. That was... Right, it was a dialect meaning "small". Un."

"Even so, that's extremely rude! Rather, there is no way such dialect exists. Why are you trying to deceive me? That appearance too... Did something happen? What are

you doing in this place? Why, why didn't you immediately come back to everyone? Nagumo-kun! Please answer! Sensei won't let you deceive her!"

Aiko's angry voice resounded inside the restaurant. Several people and guests looked at the rumored "Goddess of Good Harvest" as she caught and shouted at a man. "Suwah, is he Goddess's man!?", as they misunderstood, their eyes sparkled with curiosity. The students and the bodyguard Knights were also came out from the interior.

The students who had seen Hajime's appearance had shocked expressions as they couldn't believe what was in front of them. Half of it

was because he was alive, while the other half was because of the drastic change to his appearance and atmosphere. However, they didn't know what should they do, so they could only blankly looked at Aiko and Hajime.

On the other side, although Hajime looked calm, his mind was attacked by petit panic. In the town he came to, after accepting the request from the guild's Branch Head he got acquaintanced by chance, he never thought there was a chance he would meet Aiko and his classmates again.

Because it was such a sudden event, he inadvertently muttered "sensei", he even thought, "That can't be~", as he tried to deceived himself. His

lifecards after Aiko's angry barrage of questions were to "run away", "continue with the mistaken person act", "became a suspicious foreigner", and "let's just kidnap Ai-chan", were all the cards that came to his mind. He especially didn't know how the last one came up.

Then, Hajime was saved by his reliable partner. Of course it was not the regrettable rabbit ears character, but the Vampire Princess. Yue, came in between Hajime and Aiko, then she forcibly shook off Aiko's hand which was gripping Hajime's arm. On their side, the bodyguard Knights were letting out slight bloodthirst.

"... Let go, Hajime is troubled."

"Wh-What are you? Currently, sensei have an important talk with Nagumo-kun..."

"... Then, calm down a little."

Because the beatiful girl stared at her with cool eyes, Aiko slightly flinched. There wasn't much of a height difference between the two. Normally, it would be labeled as a fight between kids. However, Aiko was actually younger by age, and Yue wore a bewitching atmosphere despite her appearance. No matter who saw it, they looked like an adult (Yue) and an angry child (Aiko). Aiko was wary of Yue, so she quietly back away from Hajime with blushing cheeks because of her own words and the way she got mad at him. As she straightened

her back to show her dignity as an adult, although it was too late, Aiko was... just like a child doing a stretch.

"I am sorry, I was distracted. Let's return from the beginning, you are Nagumo-kun, right?"

This time, Aiko said it quietly, but her voice was filled with conviction as she tried to ask Hajime, and matched her glance with him. Having seen such Aiko, Hajime was convinced no matter how he tried to deceive her, she wouldn't change her conviction and she would chase after him no matter where he go. Thus, scratched his head and replied with a profound sigh.

"Ah. Long time no see, sensei."

"As expected, you're Nagumo-kun after all... You're alive..."

Aiko's eyes became teary again, but Hajime didn't think anything about it as he shrugged his shoulders.

"Something like that. After a lot happened, I'm somehow still alive."

"I am glad. I truly am glad."

After he took a glance at Aiko who was unable to say more than those words, Hajime went to the nearest table and sat down. Having seen him, Yue and Shia also sat. Shia was somewhat perplexed. Aiko and the others were astonished by Hajime's sudden action. Hajime had regained his composure and he ignored the

surroundings, only to beckon towards Foss who had watched how the situation progressed while he stood behind the students.

"Umm, Hajime-san. Is that okay? Aren't you acquaintances? Although it was just my guess... the other world's..."

"That thing doesn't matter at all. I was just surprised when they suddenly appeared, well, that's all. We are originally came for dinner, so let's order now. I have been truly expecting this. Don't you know? This curry... Ah, you didn't know it. The spicy dish was called Nilshisseer. I am happy just by imagining the taste..."

"... Then, I'll order that, too. I want

to know what taste Hajime like."

"Ah, to casually appealed him... just a expected of Yue-san. Then, me too. Clerk-saa~n, we want to order~"

In the beginning, Shia was timidly sneaking glances at Aiko and the others, but changed her mind after Hajime said those words. Then Foss came by to take their order with a troubled smile.

However, naturally, there was no time for them to wait. Aiko, who was dumbfounded again by how Hajime seated himself at a nearby table and began to order, returned her to her senses and she approached Hajime's table. She said, "Sensei is angry!", with a truly

angered expression as she pishi, hit the table.

"Nagumo-kun, our talk isn't over. Just how can you start to order as if it were the most natural thing in the world. In the first place, just who are these girls?"

What Aiko had said represented the feelings of everyone around them. The Knights who guessed Hajime was Aiko's student, who they heard had died four months ago, the students who waited behind Aiko, and everyone else were, "Un un.", nodding and they waited for Hajime's answer.

Hajime frowned because of it would be an annoyance. Because he thought he couldn't have a calm

meal thanks to Aiko, who would keep waiting until he answers her questions even as they ate, he reluctantly turned his glance toward Aiko.

"I have come here in just a single day, without stopping, because of a request. That's why I am hungry, so just let me eat my meal. Also, these are..."

Hajime turned his glance towards Yue and Shia. And these two, before Hajime could say it, began an impactful introduction towards Aiko and the others.

"...Yue."

"I am Shia."

"" I am Hajime(-san)'s woman.""

"Wo-woman?"

Aiko somewhat stammered said, "Eh? Eh?", as she alternately looked between Hajime and the two beautiful girls. It seemed she couldn't processed the information. The students behind her were also perplexed. Well, the male students' expressions said, "That can't be!", as they restlessly looked between Yue and Shia. Gradually, their face reddened as they were charmed by their beauty.

"Oi, setting Yue aside. Shia, aren't you different?"

"That! Hajime-san so cruel. Even though you stole my first kiss!"

"No, just how long you want to drag that thing. That was lif—"Nagumo-kun?"...What is it, sensei?"

Because of the remark that he "stole Shia's first kiss", it seemed her thought process had finally caught up. Then, Aiko's voice dropped an octave. Inside Aiko's head, it seemed she imagined the scene where Hajime was laughing loudly while being attended by the two beauties in each arm. Her expression said everything.

Blushing, Aiko interrupted Hajime's words. Her face was filled with determination to return her misconducting student into the right path. Following that, a large thunder called "Sensei's anger" fell

into Ul town's number one and first class inn.

"To steal a woman's first kiss, and even t-two-timing! So, you didn't immediately return because you wanted to play around! If so... that's unforgivable! Ee, sense will absolutely not forgive it! It's time for scolding! Just wait there, Nagumo-kun!"

Hajime looked at Aiko with a skeptical gaze, who yelled "kyan kyan," as he let out a deep, deep sigh thinking it was going to be troublesome.

Chapter 56: Aiko's Worries

* * *

Because of Aiko's roar, Hajime and his party were guided to a VIP seat, away from the eyes of the other guests. Then, Aiko, Sonobe Yuka, and other students bombarded him with questions. However, Hajime was focused on the Nilshisseer (other world's version of curry) in front of his eyes. He answered them in a daze.

Q : You fell from that bridge, what happened afterwards?
A : I did my best.

Q : Why did your hair turn white?
A : The result of me doing my best.

Q : What happened to your eye?
A : The result of me doing my ultra best.

Q : Why didn't you immediately return?
A : No reason to do so.

After hearing that much, Aiko yelled angrily with her cheeks puffed, "Please answer us seriously!" Indeed, her being unable to show any intensity in that action was a sad thing. As usual, Hajime looked like a willow when the wind blew. Without matching her gaze, he deliciously enjoyed the Nilshiseer, while sometimes listening to Yue

and Shia's quarrel. His face was full of satisfaction.

Angered by his appearance, was the commander of Aiko's bodyguards, David. He couldn't endure the woman he fell for being ignored. That's why he threw his fist onto the table and a loud sound rang out.

"Oi, you! You're being asked by Aiko! Answer her seriously!"

Hajime took a glance at David, then "Haa", let out a sigh.

"Aren't we eating now? Behave yourself."

His protest was completely ignored. However, David has great pride because, as a Temple Knight, he

was entrusted as the commander of an important person's bodyguard, so he couldn't endure it and his face turned red. Following that, because Hajime wouldn't give him a clear answer, he changed his target as he turned to look at Shia.

"Hmm, did you say behave? That word, I return it back at you. To have a dirty animal share the same table as humans, you are the one who has no manners. Won't you at least chop off those ugly ears? She will look more human like that."

Shia's body trembled as she was stared at with eyes full of disdain. In Brook town, from her impression of the inn, having been close to Catherine, added to Hajime's existence, it was full of amiable

people. Although there were lots of discriminating eyes in Fhuren, and even though they recognized her as a slave, no one made fun of her by directly saying that.

In other words, since the beginning of her journey with Hajime, this was the first time she had directly received discriminating words as a demi-human. Although she wanted to think nothing of it, she was slightly surprised by the attack, even after she had got accustomed to the outside world, she could still feel the damage. Shun, Shia looked down depressedly.

If she looked carefully, she could see that it wasn't limited to just David. Chase and the other Knights also looked at Shia with the same

eyes. No matter how intimate they were with Aiko and her students, they were Temple and Imperial Knights. They were men from the Church of Saints and the Kingdom, so their discrimination towards the demi-human race was strong. After all, the source of discrimination were the Church of Saints and the Kingdom. Even though David and the Knights were influenced by Aiko and could think for themselves, they wouldn't have changed after only a few months because this sense of value was not so shallow-rooted.

Because it was something unreasonable, Aiko instinctively tried to protest. But before that, Yue who grasped the downcast Shia's hand, directed a glare as cold as

absolute zero at David. A cold gaze that seemed to be able to freeze one's body came from the highest class, bisque doll-like beautiful girl. David flinched for a moment, but became enraged when he saw that the pressure was coming from a girl with the appearance of a child. Usually, he wouldn't easily lose his temper, but the words he'd just spoke, and looking at his dear Aiko, he had lost it.

"What, what's with those eyes? That's rude! Even though you aren't a God's apostle, you are trying to oppose a Temple Knight!"

David spontaneously stood up. Although the vice-commander Chase tried to stop him, faster than that, Yue's words clearly rang out in

that uproar.

"...A small man."

Those were words of ridicule. Words that ridiculed how small his vessel was, to shout just because of a difference in race, and lose his temper when glared at by a girl. David was already lost in anger. As a man, being called small in front of Aiko drove him over the edge.

"... You pagan. I'll send you to hell along with that animal."

As he quietly muttered that without any expression, David reached for the sword by his side. Because the carnage appeared all too sudden, the students were flustered, while Aiko, Chase, and the Knights were

all trying to stop him. However, as though he didn't hear the surrounding voices, David finally slightly pulled the sword from its sheath.

At the same time,

DOPANh!!

A dry, explosive sound echoed inside "Water Fairy Inn". At the same time, David, who was about to pounce at any time, was hit in the head and got blown away. As it were, the back of David's head hit the wall behind him, hard, and a terrific sound resounded. His eyes turned white as he collapsed. The sword was released from David's hand and gashan!, it fell to the floor.

No one was able to comprehend what had happened just now, and were all stunned. Their gazes turned to David who collapsed with the whites of his eyes showing. Then someone was curious as to what had happened to emit such a large and explosive sound, it was Foss, who pulled the curtain. Following that, he became wide-eyed as he was stunned by the disastrous scene in front of him.

On the other side, Aiko and the others were finally able to regain their senses when Foss entered. Their gazes which were then directed toward David, were naturally drawn to the source of the explosive sound.

In that place was something Aiko and her students had knowledge of, but had never actually seen. It was something from the other world, something completely unknown to the Knights. There was the figure of Hajime holding a "gun" while seated. White smoke came out of Donner. At least the bullet he shot was a non-lethal rubber bullet.

Although they didn't know the details, the Knights had guessed it was Hajime's attack, so they simultaneously put their hands on their swords while letting out killing intent. However, what immediately followed, was by a violent killing intent incomparable to the Knights'. It was as though they were attacked by a hammer that fell from heaven, as the

Knights who began to stand were forced to sit back down into their seats.

Although they weren't submerged in the killing intent, having felt the pressure Hajime emitted, Aiko and the others turned pale as they trembled.

Hajime put Donner on the table and gotoh, it made an unnatural noise. Its purpose was to threaten them. Following that, he clearly declared his standing and asked where Aiko and the others would choose to stand.

"I have no interest in you lot. I have never thought of wanting a relationship with you guys. Moreover, I won't say anything

about what had happened to me or what I want to do. I am only here for work, so I'll resume my journey once it's over. That's where we say good bye. Also, let's not intervene with each other. No matter what kind of selfish things you want to do, just don't obstruct me. Just like now, if you become hostile... I'll likely kill you."

Understand? Was what Hajime's eyes asked, but no one said anything. Immediately, he turned his gaze towards Chase and the Knights, who desperately endured the Pressure, and all they could do was slightly nod.

Next, Hajime turned his gaze towards Aiko and her students. Aiko didn't say anything. No, more

like she couldn't. It was not only because of the pressuring feelings that gushed out, but also because of Hajime's words, and how her student change without her knowing. Those were not something Aiko's pride could allow.

Hajime sighed as he shrugged his shoulders and canceled the "Pressure." Although there was no answer from Aiko, Hajime could somehow sympathize with her feelings, so he didn't force her for an answer. The other students were obviously frightened, so he guessed they wouldn't dare challenge him.

With the tremendous feeling of oppression vanished, the Knights collapsed and let out deep sighs. Aiko and her students were also

exhausted and sat deeply on the chairs. As though nothing had happened, Hajime resumed his meal, and talked to the depressed Shia.

"Oi, Shia. That's something normal "outside." There is no need to take it seriously, okay?"

"Yes, that's right... Although I understand that,... as expected, for humans, these ears are disgusting."

With self-derision, Shia patted her ears with her hands and let out a bitter smile. To such a Shia, Yue whispered words to comfort her with honest eyes.

"...Shia's ears are lovely."

"Yue-san... Is that so?"

Even so, Shia was still unconvinced about it, so this time Hajime followed up with a somewhat amazed expression. Because Yue often said "Bad!" to him, Hajime's attitude towards Shia had softened little by little, and he tried to comfort her with the utmost of his ability.

"You know, their education was practically brainwashing from the Church and nobles of the Kingdom, so it's just their feelings of aversion. Don't you know that the Rabbitman tribe are the number one most popular pet slaves? In other words, no one thinks of you as disgusting in general."

"Th—... that's so... ...U-umm, by the way Hajime-san,... Umm... what do you think... about my ears?"

Having guessed that those words were Hajime's own way of comforting her, Shia felt slightly happy. Then she asked him with an upward gaze with blushing cheeks. As if saying, "I want to know, but at the same time don't want to," her rabbit ears completely drooped, and sometimes they twitched towards Hajime.

"... I don't think anything about them..."

Stealing a glance at the rabbit ears, Hajime returned his gaze towards his meal as he tried to deceive her, and replied snappishly. The rabbit

ears drooped even more as though they regretted asking. However, with the next line from Yue, they immediately regained their energy as they stood up; hyupa!.

"... They are Hajime's favorite. He cuddles them when Shia's sleeping."

"Yue!? Didn't you promise not to tell her that!?"

"Ha-Hajime-san... you like my rabbit ears... Ehehe."

With her cheeks dyed red, Shia tried to suppress her grin with both hands, and as if saying "Wa~i!", her rabbit ears above were moving, expressing her delight.

The awkward and strained

atmosphere of massacre that floated in the air until now had dissipated as if it were an illusion. The atmosphere had mysteriously turned pink-colored, so Aiko and her students, even the Knights were blinking in amazement. For a while, they watched Hajime's love-comedy interaction, then one of the male students; Aikawa Noboru muttered.

"Huh? How strange. Although until just now Nagumo was truly scary, now it isn't killing intent that's gushing out..."

"You too, huh. Rather, those two, although they are dangerously cute,... although they're totally in my strike-zone,... but, to flirt in front of my eyes is torture for me..."

"... It's just as Nagumo said, those things don't matter at all. But, having the skill to get along with girls from another world... I want to ask him how!... Noboru! Akira!"

""Heh, we are going to hell together, Atsushi!""

With their eyes boiling with envy, they stared at the Hajime who made them shudder until just now; it was the unison of three males from Ai-chan's bodyguards. The serious atmosphere was completely blown away. The female students began to regain their original demeanor, and they looked at the male students with terribly cold eyes.

Chase, having realized the atmosphere had calmed down,

started to heal David. At the same time, with his caution and hostility were subdued, he asked Hajime with a smile. Apart from Hajime's circumstances, there was something he had to hear by all means.

"Is it okay to call you Nagumo-kun? About before, my commander had been rude. No matter what, we are Aiko-san's bodyguards after all, so we become oversensitive if it concerns Aiko-san. Somehow, I would like for you to forgive us."

Although Hajime wanted to interrupt him and say, "How can oversensitivity turn into murder?", but the word 'murder' itself made him unable to say anything. That's why he just silently waved his hand

to tell him to stop that. Because of this perfunctory attitude, Chase's eyebrows slightly twitched, but his poker face-like smile didn't crumble. Following that, with quick thinking, because he couldn't just leave it at that, he cut to the case about Hajime's artifact-like thing in front of him.

"I assume... that's an artifact. Although I can't be sure with my limited knowledge, I can see that it's quite a powerful one. It's much faster than a bow, it also didn't need chanting or a magic circle. Just where on Earth did you get it?"

Although he was smiling, Chase's eyes weren't. Judging from his words, since there wasn't the presence of magic being used, he

thought it had a bow-like pure physical mechanism and could be mass-produced. If so, it'd be a great help for the sake of dominating against enemies before war breaks out. However the Knights weren't a match for Hajime, so he at least wanted to get information out of him.

Hajime stole a glance at Chase. Following that, before he could say anything, he was interrupted by an excited voice. It was a male classmate; Tamai Atsushi.

"Th-That's right, Nagumo. Isn't that a gun!? Just, how did you get ahold of that!?"

Chase reacted to Tamai's shout.

"Gun? Tamai, do you know anything about that?"

"Eh? Ah, that's right, I know of it. It's a weapon from our world."

Chase's eyes shone because of Tamai's words. But afterwards, he stared at Hajime.

"Hou, in other words, it isn't an artifact from this world... If that's so, it must be made by someone from a different world... and of course the maker is..."

"It is me."

Hajime easily answered that he made it. Chase, because he held the impression of Hajime as a secretive person, was surprised by how easily

he admitted it.

"You admit it so easily. Nagumo-kun, do you know what it means to hold that weapon? That..."

"It could completely change the situation of the war in this world,... right? That's if you can mass-produce it. Mostly, you want me to return with you and teach you how to make it, or something like that? Naturally, I reject it all. Just give up."

Hajime's words had left him completely helpless. Those words seemed to be prepared beforehand. But, Chase didn't give up. That's how attractive the gun was.

"But, the Soldiers with low levels

can have high offense if it could be mass produced. When that happens, we can make use of a lot of people in the upcoming war, and our chances of victory will also greatly increase. If you cooperate, doesn't it mean you also help your teacher and friends? If so..."

"No matter what you want to say, I won't cooperate. If you try to take it, then it means you're my enemy. At that time... be prepared to be annihilated even before the war breaks out."

Hajime's quiet words sent a chill toward Chase's whole body and he shut his mouth. Then, Aiko managed to intervene there.

"Chase-san. Nagumo-kun has his

own intentions. Please don't force my student. Nagumo-kun too, please stop saying such extreme things. Be more peaceful... Nagumo-kun, are you seriously not coming back?"

"Ah, I don't want to return with you. Tomorrow morning, after I complete the request, I'll leave as is."

"Why..."

Aiko looked at Hajime with a pained expression, she wanted to know his reason, but Hajime rose from his seat before she could ask. Unbeknownst to them, Yue and Shia had also finished their meals. Although Aiko tried to stop him, Hajime ignored her and climbed the

stairs to the second floor, accompanied by Yue and Shia.

At the time Aiko and the others were left behind, a subtle and indescribable atmosphere was in the air. They were glad the classmate they thought was dead was actually alive. But, for the person himself, they seemed to have not even registered in his eyes. Moreover, he had become strong to the point, that it was impossible to compare him to his past self. He was not the same as the one who was once called "incompetent" in contempt as they looked at him from above.

Moreover, about the contempt, they had pretended not to notice Hiyama and his friends bullying him.

Followed by that "friendly fire" incident, they could only feel more indebted because of Hajime's ambiguous attitude. As a result, no one could proactively reach out to Hajime.

Aiko herself was greatly shaken by her student's change and angered by the current development in her mind, so she was unable to stop Hajime.

Chase, while he looked at the currently recovering David at the side, seemed to think of something.

With their meals completely cooled, their appetites also disappeared. Without looking at the food in front of them, all of them began to deeply think about how "Hajime survived"

after he left them.

Just what on Earth could completely change a person like that, what did Hajime think at that time when the "friendly-fire" incident happened, what the current Hajime thought of them... Most likely, he held a grudge against them. With those thoughts making revolutions in their minds, all of them became depressed, and the day was over.

* * *

In the middle of the night. Surrounded by the night, they were completely exhausted. Both physically and mentally, thanks to the unexpected development. All of

them fell asleep, but Aiko wasn't able to sleep even now. Aiko's room was a single room, so it was not a large one. A table set and bed with carved wooden feet, a small fireplace, and a leather sofa in front of it. In the winter, the flame would surely brightened the room, and the inn guests would be warmed just by seeing it.

Aiko was thinking about what happened earlier today, she watched the unlit fireplace while deeply entrusting her body to the sofa. The insides of Aiko's head was like an unarranged bookshelf, with all of that information in disorder.

Even if she couldn't think about it, she wanted to think. And from then on, her head that ran round and

around in circles didn't give out any constructive opinions at all. She recalled smiling when she found out her student was alive, then she could only knit her eyebrows because of his unamicable attitude.

She had seen a glimpse of Hajime's power through David's speech and conduct, she thought he wouldn't have been able to survive if he didn't change, and how much hardship Hajime must have experienced. At that point she could only let out a sigh because she couldn't help him at all. However, she recalled his interactions with the two girls, she thought he must have found companions he could trust, and she smiled again.

And, suddenly, a voice rang out

inside the room where there should be no one but her inside.

"Why do you keep changing your expression, sensei?"

"Kh!?"

Aiko turned around to the source of the voice while wide-eyed. There was Hajime who stood at the entrance door with his arms folded. Aiko was so surprised that she became tongue-tied, but somehow managed to speak.

"Na-Nagumo-kun? Wh-Why are you here, how..."

"Even if you ask how, I just came through the door, no more no less."

"Eh, but the lock..."

"My class is transmutation master, you know? Unlike the locks on earth, I can open this kind of lock mechanism."

Hajime lightly answered, which stunned Aiko for a while. Her heart loudly throbbed in surprise and that somehow managed to calm her down. She frowned, then criticized him.

"At such a time, moreover it's rude to suddenly barge into a woman's room without even a knock. To purposely open the lock... just what do you want?"

For a moment, the word yobai came into Aiko's mind but she

immediately erased the thought. She slightly shook her head as she recalled the fact that the other person was her student. Hajime only warded off Aiko's scolding like a willow blown by the wind, and he told her the reason for this thoughtless visit.

"Well, I am sorry about that. I just didn't want anyone to know about this visit. I wanted to talk to sensei, but before, there were the fellows from the Church and the Kingdom, so I couldn't do it. After all, the contents of this talk might have angered those guys."

"A talk? Nagumo-kun, it was okay to talk to sensei and the others..."

By chance, she thought he wanted

to return with them, and Aiko's eyes shined in expectation. If it was a consultation from her student, then it was as though the room was a teacher's office. But her expectations were immediately denied by Hajime.

"No, I don't want to return, you know? So stop looking at me with those eyes filled with expectation... What I want to talk about now is something I thought sensei would be the most calm to listen to it. After this talk, I'll leave what you want to do to your own."

Having said that, Hajime began to talk about the story of "Liberators" and the Mad Gods he heard from Oscar.

Hajime obviously had his own reasons for telling Aiko this story. According to the Gods' intentions, the heroes; Kouki and the others, were made to dance in their game, and the Gods never intended to return them to their own world. To save the human race from the demon race, in other words to win the upcoming war, is the result of the Gods pulling the strings behind the stage in the first place. The heroes themselves were only interesting pieces they had gathered without any real reason. Rather, they only thought it was more appropriate to start a new game using the heroes.

However, for Hajime, there was no reason to pointedly explain this to Kouki and the other students. He

wasn't interested with what his classmates wanted to do, and it would also only be a hassle for him. Even if he told him, that man who believed that justice always laid with the majority wouldn't believe him.

Because he was alone, between the words of a boy who had changed drastically and words that requested to save the majority, he didn't even need to think about who they would trust. Rather, because many people believe and worship "Ehito-sama," he'd only be mocked and criticized. Because of that, Hajime didn't want to become related to Kouki in the least.

However, by coincidence upon coincidence, it resulted in him

meeting Aiko. Hajime himself knew Aiko's main principles always centered around her students. In other words, regardless of the circumstances of this other world, she would calmly make a decision for the sake of her students. Following that, judging from the attitudes of his classmates today, and how they yearned for Japan, if it was Aiko, surely her words would be able to influence them. Those were Hajime's thoughts.

Although, he didn't know how her influence would change their actions. With this information, if the movement of Kouki and the others became different from what the Gods intended, they'd surely put much more attention towards Kouki and the others. Hajime

already knew that his existence would stand out like a sore thumb when he journeyed to conquer the Great Dungeons, and there was the possibility of receiving interference from the Gods. That's why, by indirectly passing the information using someone they trust, he could rearrange the actions of Kouki and the others. Thus, he could delay being noticed by the Gods. His only objective was to draw attention away from himself.

In addition, without relying on the Gods, Hajime's aim was to search for different ways for them to return. Furthermore, just like the "Liberators," he wanted to show Kouki and the others how their original allies became manipulated enemies, it's his intention to plant

the wedge of distrust towards those Gods.

In the first place, he was only able to think of this idea because of the coincidental meeting with Aiko, so Hajime never expected anything out of it. For Hajime, there was no grudge nor hatred towards his classmates. He was just indifferent towards them. If they could be used, then he'd used them, and he'd leave them alone if they didn't seem useful. That's why he didn't disclose this information only by chance.

Having heard the truth of this world from Hajime, Aiko was dumbfounded. It was not known if she truly understood it. Processing this information, no matter what kind of ideas she got, it still took

her more time.

"Well, that's all. That's what I came to know from the depths of the Abyss. I'll leave what to do after knowing this to sensei. It's okay to think of it as just nonsense, and it's also okay to move into action if you think it's the truth. Just do as you want to."

"Na-Nagumo-kun, don't tell me, to deal with those "Mad Gods"... you began your journey?"

"Hah, that can't be. I feel from the bottom of my heart that it doesn't matter what happens to this world. I am only searching for a method to return. That's why I went on a journey. The reason I'm telling you this is because it seems like it'd be

convenient to do so, that's all."

Aiko wore an indescribably subtle expression because he snorted at her question. Although she was relieved he didn't rashly poke his head into danger, she couldn't help but frown as a teacher because of how easily he said he could cast the others away. But, she herself also made her students her first priority in this world, so she couldn't say anything back. As a result, she tried to change the topic with a subtle expression.

"Do you believe in that?"

"That's so. The Great Dungeons are the keys. It's okay if you search for it if they interest you. Once you exceed the 100th level of Orcus,

you'll happily find the real Great Dungeon. First of all, by looking at your appearances today, you'll immediately die when you go there. It's out of the question if you can't ignore "Pressure" of that level."

Aiko was reminded of the pressure that gushed out from Hajime at dinner time. Following that, she opened her eyes filled with complex feelings of sympathy, admiration, and other various feelings when she thought again about the harsh conditions he must have lived through.

For a while, their silence continued. The room was filled with silence. Hajime was certain the information was received after looking at Aiko's appearance. And because he had no

more business, he immediately turned his heels and walked towards the door. Behind him, Aiko told him about a certain student she remembered when they talked about the Orcus dungeon.

"Shirasaki-san still hasn't given up on you."
"..."

Hajime stopped walking because of the unexpected words from Aiko. Then, Aiko spoke softly with Hajime's back in front of her.

"Although everyone believed you were dead, she is the only one who didn't give up on you. Before she confirms it with her own eyes, she believes you are still alive. Even now, she's still fighting in the Orcus

Great Dungeon. Even though Amanokawa-kun and the others are only going to the dungeon for training, her only purpose is to search for you."

"... Is Shirasaki okay?"

After a long silence, Hajime asked Aiko. Hajime who took an indifferent attitude towards them, began to ask about another with words of concern. Aiko, who discovered that the original Hajime still existed, displayed a joyful expression.

"Y-Yes. Although the Orcus Great Dungeon is a dangerous place, her ability has developed well, and she continues to conquer the dungeon. Sometimes letters come from her.

Are you curious about her? Nagumo-kun and Shirasaki-san got along after all."

Aiko talked with a bright smile, but Hajime only expressionlessly looked back over his shoulder without denying or affirming anything.

"Although I didn't mean it like that... it's good if you tell her this when you exchange letters. What she should be cautious of is not the demonic beasts in the dungeon. It's her companions."

"Eh? What do you..."

"Sensei, I can already guess the situation from the attitude of Tamai and the others today. The cause of me falling in battle against the

Behemoth, you think it was just an accident « ... », right?"

"Th-That's... Yes. Some magic went out of control and resulted in accidental friendly-fire... Nagumo-kun still holds a grudge against everyone after all..."

"I don't think of anything like that. The thing I want to say is this. Friendly fire? That's wrong. That was a magic bullet clearly specifically cast with me as target."

"Eh? Specifically cast? Targeted, you say?"

Aiko's expression said she couldn't understand what he meant. But, Hajime left words that mercilessly pushed Aiko's worry further.

"It means, a classmate was trying to kill me."
"Kh!?"

Aiko was stunned and her face paled, "I only know that the culprit is someone related to Shirasaki, it's someone who's able to kill another person out of envy. Because she is still okay, it's good to advise Shirasaki to be careful of an attack from behind." After leaving this message, Hajime went out of the room.

Shin, there was an illusion of cold wind blowing inside the room, and Aiko embraced her own body with both arms. There was a possibility that one of her precious students tried to kill a companion.

Furthermore, they used a cowardly method by aiming at his back when he was at the brink of death. For Aiko, who treasured her students, it was something she couldn't accept easily. But, she couldn't deny Hajime's words without any evidence. Her mind that wanted to believe her students clashed with each other.

With her worries deepening, Aiko's sleepless night increased.

Chapter 57: The Northern Mountain Range Area

* * *

Daybreak.

With the waning moonlight, the eastern sky began to lit up. Hajime, Yue, and Shia, these three people completed their travel preparations, and soon they would leave the "Water Fairy Inn." In their hands were packaged riceballs that could be eaten as they move. Even though it was still early in the morning, no one wore unpleasant faces as Foss prepared their breakfast. It was just

as expected of a high-class inn. Its management was admired even by Hajime and his party, as they thanked him without reserve once they received the breakfast.

Within the morning mist, Hajime and his party faced towards Ul's northern gate. There was a highway that stretched from this place to the northern mountain range area. It would take at least a full day by horse, but they would arrive in three to four hours using the magic-driven two-wheeler.

It was the fifth day since they had lost contact with Will Kudeta and his party, who had gone to investigate northern mountain range area. Survival was hopeless. Hajime also thought Will and his

party's odds of survival were low, but there was still a chance. Ilwa's image of Hajime would climb to a pinnacle if he brought him back alive, which was why he began searching as soon as possible. Fortunately, the weather was good. An ideal day to search for someone.

With sounds of activity beginning to resound inside the buildings, they advanced towards the northern gate, and could finally see the gate. He narrowed his eyes because he could sense signs of people near the northern gate. They didn't move or anything, but only hung around the gate.

What he saw through the morning mist... ... were Aiko and the six students.

"... ... Although I can guess what you want, let me hear it anyway... ... What are you doing?"

Hajime and his party looked at Aiko and the students with half-opened eyes. For a moment, Aiko twitched from the pressure in the atmosphere, but she still faced Hajime with a firm attitude. After having a discussion, the students; Sonobe Yuka, Sugawara Taeko, Miyazaki Nana, Tamai Atsushi, Aikawa Noboru, and Kawahara Akira, drew near Aiko.

"We are also going. You're searching for missing people, right? It's better to have more people."

"No. I am okay with you going. But,

I refuse to go together."

"Wh-Why?"

"Simply because our pace is different. I don't want to match your slow speed."

If one were to look closely, they would notice that there were several horses readied behind Aiko and the others. For a moment they thought, "Was it because he cannot ride horses?", as they doubted Hajime. Since it was trivial, he just let it go through their heads. No matter whether he could ride it or not, its speed couldn't compare to the magic-driven two-wheeler, after all. However, the virtual leader of Ai-chan's royal guard who loved her; Sonobe Yuka, snapped at

Hajime's objection. Apparently, she had forgotten her debt and intimidation from Hajime yesterday because of the strength of her love towards Ai-chan.

"Wait, how could you say that? Even if Nagumo doesn't think well of us, there's no need to involve Ai-chan sensei."

Because of the incredibly irrelevant objection, Hajime let out, "Haa?", with an amazed expression. Hajime thought it'd be a hassle to explain, so he silently took out the magic-driven two-wheeler from "Treasure Box".

Suddenly, a big bike appeared from the void, Aiko and the students could only let out stupefied looks.

"Do you understand now? Yesterday I said that I absolutely don't care about whatever you guys want to do. That's why there's no need to snarl at me. It's just like I said before, our speed is different."

The magic-driven two-wheeler's profound form, and maybe because it was an existence that didn't belong in this different world, made Aiko and the onlooking students speechless. There, the bike-lover in the class; Aikawa asked Hajime while somewhat excited.

"D-Did Nagumo make this just like the gun from yesterday?"

"Something like that. We are going now, so move aside."

Hajime answered him perfunctorily as he was about to embark, but Aiko kept standing still. Aiko wanted to tag along with Hajime and his party no matter what it took. She had two reasons. One was to search for the truth about what Hajime said last night. Aiko couldn't just overlook the words, "A classmate was trying to kill him", so she wanted find out if it was the truth or just Hajime's misunderstanding. If it was the truth she wanted to know what Hajime was going to do. She wanted to hear more details from Hajime for the sake of avoiding any accidents that might happen in the future. Once the search ended, she didn't know when she'd be able to meet Hajime and his party again, so

she mustn't miss this chance.

The other reason was, because Shimizu Yukitoshi was currently still missing. Although they had tried to find any scrap of information without leaving even a stone unturned, there were no sightings of him in any of the nearby towns and villages. However, because there was no one living in the northern mountain range area in the first place, she remembered there was no information gathered there. Even if it was on his own accord or by accident, she naturally never thought he'd enter the northern mountain range area. But with the thought he'd left on his own, she thought of searching for Shimizu's trail while Hajime and his party looked for the missing

people.

By the way, it was partly a coincidence that Sonobe and the other students were here. Aiko had wanted to go to the gate earlier than Hajime, in order to ambush him, so she tried to leave the inn before dawn, only to be seen by Sonobe Yuka who was going to the toilet. Because Aiko equipped herself with travelling gear and tried to leave at such an unreasonable time, Sonobe Yuka of Ai-chan's bodyguards questioned her without letting her tell a lie. As the result, because they couldn't just leave Ai-chan to the changed Hajime. Sonobe woke up all of the students and tried to join the search mission. It should be noted that they had left a letter to the Knights,

telling them to watch the house, since it seemed like they would only strike up more trouble if they went with Hajime and his party. Though it wasn't known how they'd react...

Aiko drew near Hajime and whispered her decision to him. Hajime moved his face close to Aiko's because he didn't want the contents and only the contents to be heard by others, but when he looked carefully he noticed she used thick makeup to conceal dark shadows. Surely, she was hardly able to sleep having heard Hajime's story.

"Nagumo-kun, because sensei is a teacher, it's necessary to hear the details from Nagumo-kun. That's why, I won't let you go until you tell

me everything, I'll chase you if you try to run away. For Nagumo-kun, won't that be troublesome? I don't care if you tell me while we are travelling or when we are searching, so will you spare some time? If you do that, then it'll be as Nagumo-kun said, it'll be good bye after this town... ... for the time being."

Hajime could see the light of determination in Aiko's eyes, and he slightly regretted his last words from last night resulted in this failure. He understood Aiko's ability to take action (Although she's often idle). If he tried to deceive her or run away, she'd likely use the Guard Knights to search for him.

He averted his gaze from Aiko and looked up at the sky, which was

becoming more and more bright. Without throwing away the possibility of Will's survival, he regretted time had passed while they argued. Hajime let out a deep sigh. He admitted that he'd just reaped what he'd sown, and faced Aiko again.

"Okay. I'll let you go with us. Even though I say that, I don't have time to speak with you..."

"I don't care. I only want to hear it from Nagumo-kun's mouth."

"Haa, geez, sensei won't give up at all. Whatever and wherever, always a teacher, huh."

"Of course!"

Aiko, "Munh!", stuck out her chest with a joyful look when Hajime gave up. Because it seemed the negotiations had gone well, the students showed relieved looks.

"... ... Hajime, are you going to bring them?"

"Aa, this person is a "teacher" even here. She will not compromise anything regarding her students. If I just leave her, it'll absolutely become troublesome in the future."

"Ho~, she is a good teacher who thinks of her students~"

Because Hajime had given up, Yue and Shia were surprised and asked him. Following that, having heard Hajime's words accompanied with a

bitter smile, the eyes with which they looked at Aiko, had changed slightly. They were filled with some respect. Even Hajime thought Aiko's attitude as their "teacher", which couldn't be shaken at all was not a bad thing. For example, she didn't find any value in categorizing the classmates and students, so he thought of her as an adult who should be respected.

"But, this bike can only hold three people, right? What should we do?"

What Sonobe pointed out was the truth. It was out of the question in regards to time, to match the horses' speed, and it was impossible to leave Yue or Shia behind to bring Aiko instead. Reluctantly, Hajime put the magic-driven two-wheeler

into "Treasure Box", and pulled out the magic-driven four-wheeler in its stead.

Pinpon, Hajime made it vanish and at the same time a big object appeared, probably because they knew he'd used an artifact, Aiko and the students were not surprised at all. Having seen the current Hajime, who on Earth could imagine he was once called "incompetent." Sonobe and the students received the message "Those who are unable to get on will be in the carrier", looked at Hajime who quickly got on the driver's seat with complicated expressions.

* * *

They moved forward on the road expanding straight into the northern mountain range area using the hummer-like magic-driven four-wheeler. Even though the highway was a bad road, thanks to the suspension and ground transmutation feature it shared with the two-wheeler, most of the impact was nulled. Naturally, the male students, aboard the hard metal luggage carrier attached to the back didn't seem to be in discomfort.

By the way, although there was the "Treasure Box", the reason he specifically installed the carrier was because it was a set with the gatling that'd be used while driving, it was his aspiration. A small commitment

from Hajime.

For the seating inside the vehicle, Hajime naturally sat in the driver's seat, while Aiko sat at his side and Yue was next to her. Aiko sat beside Hajime for the sake of hearing his story. Although Aiko seemed to not have told it to the other students, she wanted to hear about it sooner.

Originally, the seat next to Hajime belonged to Yue, but Yue already knew the contents of the story Hajime would tell, so reluctantly, she gave her seat to Aiko. But, Aiko and Yue were small, so there was still a considerable amount of space in the seat.

In contrast, Shia who was seated in the back seat looked slightly

cramped. Shia aside, Sonobe and Sugawara had voluptous bodies, so they took up a lot of space. The slender Miyazaki looked so uncomfortable.

But, the one who felt the most uncomfortable was Shia. She had been placed between Sonobe and Sugawara for a while now, and they interrogated her about her relationship with Hajime. Love between different races in another world was something female high schoolers wouldn't miss hearing. They were so curious that they repeatedly asked Shia, and the flustered Shia tried her best to answer their questions.

On the other side, Hajime and Aiko's conversation also reached its

climax.

Having heard the situation in detail about that time from Hajime, while she knew the possibility of magic being fired intentionally was high, Aiko was still unable to believe it and was troubled by it. When he heard her, Hajime only snorted as his reply.

For now, he already guessed it was someone like Hiyama, and although Hajime's guess was closest to the right answer, he only said this was one of the possibilities. After all, Aiko wouldn't be able to arrive at such a conclusion, and even if the culprit could be specified, how could she restore the mind of someone who attempted murder? How could one compensate for

that? She was troubled, with those thoughts on her mind.

She groaned because she was troubled by this, but due to the soft seat and vibrating vehicle inviting her to sleep Aiko started off on her journey to the world of dreams before she was aware of it, zuruzuru, her body slipped until she fell onto Hajime's lap.

Normally, he'd send her flying because it's a hindrance, but because he felt it awkward to act rude toward Aiko, he hesitated over what to do, then he decided to leave her as is. After all, Hajime's information was the main cause of Aiko's sleep deprivation. So if it's just this, he felt that it couldn't be helped, as he displayed unusual

generosity.

"... ... Hajime is gentle to Aiko."

"... ... Well, it is someone I'm indebted to, so something like this is okay."

"... ... Fu~n."

"Yue?"

"... ..."

"Yue-san, please don't ignore me."

"... ... Next, I will also use the lap pillow."

"... ... Okay."

Even though Aiko was still lap

pillowed, Hajime and Yue were able to enter a world of their own. In the back seat, the female high schoolers watched them while going "kya kya," followed by a sulking rabbit-eared girl. From now on, they were entering a dangerous zone where unknown accidents might occur but no one thought about it as they made such a noise.

* * *

The northern mountain range area.

Several mountains extended with altitudes ranging from 1000 to 8000 meters. Plants and trees were somehow able to grow there. It was a mysterious place with a scattered

environment. The colour would make one remember the mountains of Japan in autumn, and the other area was filled with trees with fresh green leaves, just like in mid-summer, but there were also places with withered trees in contrast.

Moreover, even if one could see past the mountain range, another mountain range stretched out beyond it. There were more and more of them to the north. Currently four such mountain ranges were confirmed, and beyond that was a completely unknown area. As to how far it went, a certain adventurer aimed to cross the fifth mountain range, however, demonic beasts got stronger and stronger with every passing mountain range, and in the end, there was no sign of

success.

Incidentally, the highest mountain was the "God Mountain". Currently, the place Hajime and the others had first arrived in when they came into this world was 1,600 kilometers east of the God Mountain. The vivid colors of red and yellow of the fresh leaves on the trees made them easy on the eyes. If a knowledgeable person were to look carefully, he would find spices and edible plants in the area. They were what enriched Ul town, a truly bountiful mountain.

Hajime and the others stopped the four-wheeler at the foot of the mountain, and were charmed by the artistic display of nature's magnificent colors for a while. One

of the girls let out a "Ho~". Some time ago, Aiko was apologizing while blushing, after making the blunder of sleeping in a student's lap. But having seen the fresh scenery, she succeeded in placing the 'black history' into the far recesses of her mind.

Hajime also wanted to slowly appreciate this, so he put the four-wheeler back into the "Treasure Box", and pulled out certain things in its stead.

Those were, imitation models of birds which spanned 30 cm each, and a ring with a small crystal embedded on it. Each of the models had a gray crystal buried in a part of their heads.

Hajime put on the ring, took out four identical models, and slowly threw them into the air. With that, one would assume they'd fall due to gravity. However, these fake birds were floating in place. Aiko and the students let out an "Ah".

The four mechanical birds began to turn around on their spots and flew towards the mountain.

"Umm, those are...."

Having seen the model birds flying away without any sound, Aiko represented the other students and inquired something of him.

Hajime answered her with "Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes", and just like the vehicles

and gun, they were items that were out of place in this different world..

The imitation model of birds called "Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes", were something Hajime made in reference to the remotely operated Golem Knights from Raisen's Great Dungeon. They were also produced using the materials he got there. Using Creation magic, he granted minerals Gravity magic because he didn't have the aptitude for using the magic himself, and they became minerals capable of neutralizing gravity as they floated. And thus, gravity stones were created. Furthermore, the induction stones which used to control the Golem Knights were used. In addition, Farsight crystals were also installed in each part of their heads.

The mineral used in the eyes of Golem Knights were Farsight stones. Similar to induction stones, it was a mineral capable of reflecting scenes witnessed by other fragments of the crystal, regardless of distance, so long as the same type of magical power was supplied to them. It seemed this was what Miledi used to determine the detailed position of Hajime and his party. Hajime installed the farsight crystal inside his magic eye, and he became capable of seeing scenery the "Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes" could see.

In the first place, there's a limit to the processing performance of a human's brain, using four simultaneously was the limit, allowing them to move around in

the sky. It's a complete mystery as to how Miledi was able to operate 50 Golems at once.

Tentatively, His brain's processing performance had been boosted when he awakened the"Light Speed", if he only had to control one plane, he could do precise movements. Moreover, when he uses "Light Speed", he could make seven planes do precise movements within a certain time limit.

This time, he took out the Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes because being able to search from the air is useful, since the scope of search was too vast. Having watched the Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes fly far away, Aiko and the students tried to stop

being surprised by Hajime's actions, however, it was a vow that might never be fulfilled.

Hajime and the others advanced into the mountain using the same path used by the adventurers. The sighting information of demonic beasts were just slightly beyond the other side of mountain path. It's in the vicinity of the sixth and seventh mountain. Because of that, Will's party of adventurers should be investigating around those parts. Having thought of this, they quickly advanced through the mountain path at a high pace, after Hajime released the Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes in that area.

Hajime and the others reached the sixth mountain in almost an hour,

and stopped. The reason was because it was necessary to search for any traces around the area...

"Haa haa, i-is it a break... ... kehoh, haa haa."

"Zee– zee– Are you okay... ... Ai-chan sensei, zee– zee–"

"Ueppu, is it okay to rest now? Haa haa, it's okay, right? I'll take a break now, kay?"

"... ... Hyuu– Hyuu."

"Geho geho, Nagumo-kun and his party are monsters...."

Aiko and her students had less physical strength than what he had expected, so it was necessary to take

a break. Naturally, Aiko and her students' statuses were originally several times higher than the average people of this world, so they didn't get exhausted until they climbed the sixth mountain. It's just that the movement speed of Hajime and his party was just too fast, that's why they climbed the mountain using all their might, and when they noticed it, their physical strength was exhausted and their legs became wobbly.

Aiko and her students desperately gasped for breath on all fours, and Hajime glanced at them with a somewhat troubled look. In any case, he had decided it was necessary to search the surroundings, as they went to the nearby river to let them rest. He

was able to determine the location because of the information from the Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes. After stating the location to Aiko and her students, who were still breathing roughly, he and his party advanced towards the river. The probability of Will's party having rested there was also high.

With Yue and Shia in the lead, they strayed from the mountain path and onto the mountain. Rustle, rustle. The sound of fallen leaves was enjoyable as they continued to walk between the trees, and before long they could hear the sound of a river. It was a sound pleasing to the ears. Shia's ears swayed happily.

Finally Hajime and his party reached the river. It was at a bigger

scale compared to a small river. Shia, who held the highest search ability, observed the surroundings while Hajime once again used the Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes to search for any presences, and there was no sign of demonic beasts nearby. They relaxed for now. Hajime and the others were sitting on the rock in the riverbank, then they talked about their search plans. Yue took off her shoes and put her feet into the river after saying "Just a little". It was her selfishness to enjoy the moment. Hajime overlooked it because Aiko and her students still hadn't caught up to them. He's a man who spoiled Yue. Shia also took this chance.

Having thought of a possibility, they moved upstream along the

riverbank. Hajime moved the Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes upstream while he looked at Yue, pasha pasha, playing with the river water with her bare feet. Although Shia was also barefooted, she only put them in the water. The feeling of the river flowing seemed to tickle her.

Aiko and her students, who finally regained their breaths, arrived. They stayed in place as they stared at Hajime and his party. However, the three male students shouted "Is this Heaven?", with sparkling eyes as they saw the barefooted Yue and Shia, while the female students returned to look at them with cold eyes. It made the male students shudder. When they noticed the gazes from Tamai and the others,

Yue and Shia got out of the river.

Aiko and her students were diligently replenishing their moisture in the riverbank. Because of the displeasing gazes from Tamai and the male students a while ago, Yue and Shia returned slight glares, and the male students trembled as they averted their gazes. Having seen such a spectacle, Aiko and the female students looked at Hajime with warm eyes. Especially Sonobe and the female students. Since they had heard various things from Shia, they wore very annoying expressions.

"Fufu, Nagumo-kun truly treasures Yue-san and Shia-san."

Aiko said such things while smiling.

Hajime wanted to say something, but stopped and just shrugged his shoulders when he saw the depressed Sonobe and the other male students. Yue was the one who took action in his stead. As if it were the most natural thing in the world, she suddenly sat on Hajime's lap.

"... Nn."

She was so pleased that she entrusted all of her weight to Hajime. It could also be called her proof of trust. Seeing that, Shia, who looked lonely, embraced Hajime from behind. Aiko's cheeks immediately blushed because a pink-colored space was generated. Sonobe and the female students were shouting, "Kya– kya–", in

excitement. Tamai and the male students ground their teeth.

Hajime being Hajime, without shaking the two off, just averted his gaze. He seemed to be slightly embarrassed. However, Hajime's expression suddenly sharpened in the next moment.

"... ... That is."
"Nn... ... did you find something?"

Having heard Hajime's muttering while he was looking far into the distance, Yue asked him. Because of his appearance, Aiko and the others blinked their eyes wondering what happened.

"On the river's upstream... ... is that a shield? Also, there are bags... ... it

looks like they're still new. It might be a hit. Yue, Shia, let's go."

"Nn...."

"Yes!"

Hajime and his party harmoniously stood up and began to prepare for departure. Aiko and the students actually still wanted to rest, and although they knew they were overdoing it, they couldn't just stand still once they saw that Hajime had found some clues. They laborously raised their still exhausted waists and once again desperately tried to follow Hajime and his party, who were advancing upstream with blistering speed.

At the location Hajime and his

party arrived at, just as he confirmed with the Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes, small round shields made of metal and bags were scattered around. However, there were dents on the round shields, and the bags were torn up in the middle with their strings pulled out.

Hajime and his party carefully examined their surroundings. Then they found some nearby trees with their barks peeled off of them They were roughly at the two meters of height. It was apparent that the bark was in such state because something had scratched it off, and at that height, it clearly wasn't the work of humans. Hajime instructed Shia to use her search ability to the fullest, while also using his own

perception skill as they approached the barkless trees.

Advancing ahead, they found signs of combat one after another. There were trees and branches that were broken in half. There were also plants that had been trampled, and furthermore, there were fragments of blades and blood scattered around. Everytime they found such traces, the expressions on Aiko and the students' faces stiffened. For a while, they chased after the signs of combat, and Shia suddenly found something shining.

"Hajime-san, this, isn't this a pendant?"

"Nn? Aa... ... it's probably something they left behind. Let me

confirm it."

After he washed off the dirt from the pendant he had received from Shia, he noticed it was not just a pendant but also a locket. He removed the clasp and saw what was inside, it was a woman's photograph. Perhaps, she was someone's lover or wife. Even though it was not a significant clue, it was not an old one but a recent one... ... it could belong to someone from the adventurers' party. That's why it'd be kept for now.

Afterwards, they found more articles of the deceased or so they called them, but they only collected items that would allow one to identify their owners. Having searched around for a while,

eventually day turned into night, and the time for them to set up camp was approaching.

Even now, there were no signs of life aside from the wild animals. Although they were cautious because of how Will and his party encountered and were attacked by demonic beasts, there were no sign of demonic beasts in their immediate surroundings. Their current location was between the eighth and ninth mountain. From what was said about crossing the mountains, usually, they would encounter one or two demonic beasts, so Hajime and the others could feel the eeriness of this situation.

After a while, the Unmanned

Reconnaissance Planes once again found a location with abnormalities. There were leftovers of great destruction 300 meters to the east. Hajime urged everyone to rush to that location.

There was a big river. A small waterfall could be seen upstream, and the volume of water was immense, with a violent current. Originally, it was likely to flow straight towards the foot of the mountain, but currently, there was a large and small river branching along the way. It was as though it was gouged by a laser or something, from the flank.

The reason they had such impressions was because the gouged part was a straight line,

while the surrounding trees and ground were scorched. Furthermore, as if they had received a big impact, a lot of trees were partly broken and thrown tens of meters to the side. On the riverside, there were big footprints measuring more than 30 centimeters.

"It seems the real combat happened here... ... These footprints were of large bipedal demonic beasts... ... Surely, there were demonic beast called Brutal beyond the second mountain after this. But, the way the ground was gouged...."

What Hajime described as Brutals were something similar to the Orcs and Ogres in RPG. Although they didn't have high intelligence, they took action as group. Because they

had a weaker version of the peculiar magic; "Vajra", called "Strong Wall," they were recognized as quite powerful enemies. They usually descend into the second mountain of the mountain range, but these demonic beasts never came into towns. In addition, they didn't have any attacks that could make such river tributaries.

Hajime thought of the Brutal as he observed the footprints, he hesitated whether to go upstream or downstream. Although Will's party had likely to escaped upstream, he thought it would be hard for them to run upstream after such combat. He doubted that they would physically and mentally run further from town.

Hajime decided to direct the Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes upstream while they head downstream. Even though the Brutals' footprints were on the riverside, the possibility of Will and his party jumping into the river was high. If so, he thought they'd likely be swept away because of physical exhaustion.

The others also agreed with Hajime's speculations, and descended towards downstream on the riverside.

Afterwards, they encountered a much more splendid waterfall compared to the one from before. Hajime and the others nimbly descended from the cliff on the side of the waterfall and landed on the

vicinity of the basin. The refreshing wind peculiar to a waterfall healed their minds and bodies which were exhausted from a day of searching. Then, Hajime felt a reaction from his "Sign Perception."

" ! This is...."
"... ... Hajime?"

Yue immediately reacted and asked him. For a while, Hajime concentrated while closing his eyes. Following that, while slowly opening his eyes, he let out a surprised voice.

"Oi oi, seriously. The Sign Perception picked up something. From the feeling, I can say it's a human. The location is... ... in the interior of waterfall's basin."

"You mean there are survivors!"

Hajime nodded towards Shia's words of confirmation. He answered, "Only one person", when Yue asked for the number of people. Aiko and her students were also surprised. It was something natural. Although the odds of survival were not zero, they actually didn't expect any at all. It was the fifth day since Will's party had gone missing. It was a miracle for even one of them to remain alive.

"Yue, please."
"... ... Nn"

While watching the waterfall basin, Hajime called Yue. Yue was able to guess Hajime's intentions from just

those few words, and she shook her right hand as the magic's trigger.

""Wave Castle," "Wind Wall"."

Then, the water in the waterfall and its basin began to split in two just like the Red Sea in Moses' legend. Moreover, the scattered water was perfectly brushed off by the wall of wind. It was the result of water magic making a high-pressure wall of water called "Wave Castle," and wind magic called "Wind Wall."

Without chanting, magic of two different attributes were activated at the same time. Having seen how they were used, Aiko and her students, although they didn't remember how many times they had done it, dropped their jaws in

astonishment. Surely, the Hebrew people also displayed such expressions.

Because her magic power was not infinite, Hajime urged Aiko and the others on, as he led them into the interior of the waterfall basin's cave. The cave they entered immediately curved upward, and they arrived at quite a large cavity. Water and light poured down from the ceiling, and the fallen water flowed into the water pool below. The reason it didn't overflow was surely because they continued flowing inside.

They discovered a man lying down in the innermost part of the cave. When they arrived at the man's side, they confirmed that he was a

young man, around 20 years of age. Although he looked like a noble, he currently looked pale and displayed the complexion of a dead person. However, there was no large injury, and because there was food remaining inside his bag, he was simply sleeping. His bad complexion was surely related to how he was the only one here.

Having seen the anxious Aiko, and because Hajime wanted to immediately identify the young man's identity, he used his artificial arm, while restraining his power to the limit, to flick the sleeping young man's forehead.

BACHIKONh!!

"Guwah!!"

He screamed as he woke up, the young man writhed while covering his forehead with both hands. Aiko and her students shuddered because of the powerful and merciless forehead flick. Hajime ignored Aiko and the students, and approached the young man with teary eyes to ask his name.

"You, are you Will Kudeta? The third son of Count Kudeta."
"Ah, eh, you are, just how on earth did you guys get here..."

Because the young man only blinked as he couldn't grasp the situation, Hajime once again made a stance to flick his forehead and slowly aimed at it.

"Answer my question. I'll increase the power by 20 percent every time you say something other than the answer."

"Eh, eh!?"

"You, are you Will Kudeta?"

"Umm, uwah, yes! That's right! I am Will Kudeta! Yes!"

For a moment, when the young man hesitated in answering, Hajime's eyes gave off a dangerous light, and he immediately thrust out his left hand. The panicked young man immediately announced his name. Apparently, he was truly the person in question. He seemed to have miraculously survived.

"I see. I am Hajime. Nagumo Hajime. I have come here on the request of the head of Fhuren's branch guild, Ilwa Chang. (For my convenience) It's good that you're alive."

"Ilwa-san!? Is that so. Once again... ... I am indebted to that person... ...Umm, I am thankful to you. You must be a remarkable person to receive a request directly from Ilwa-san."

Will voiced gratitude with respectful eyes. It seemed he didn't mind the forehead flick with unbelievable power from a little while ago. If so, he might be an unexpectedly good person. A great difference than a pig from somewhere. After that, having

introduced everyone, they heard the story of what happened to Will.

This was the summary.

Five days ago, Will's party came to the vicinity of the upper part of fifth mountain using the mountain path just like Hajime and the others. Suddenly, they encountered ten Brutals. As expected, they couldn't win against the number of Brutals they encountered, so Will's party tried to withdraw. But, the number of attacking Brutals kept increasing, and they were by the river of the sixth mountain when they noticed it. Then, the Brutals encircled them, so for the sake of escaping from the encirclement. Two people; trifling and unimportant soldiers, were

sacrificed After that, when they arrived at a big river, despair appeared.

It appeared to be a jet-black Dragon. As soon as Will's party came along the river bank, the Black Dragon let out breath, and Will was blown off into the river by the attack. From what he saw while being swept away, one person vanished because of the breath, while the other two were attacked from both sides, by Brutals from the back and the Dragon from the front.

Will fell into the basin of the waterfall after he was swept away as is, he went into the cave he had found by chance, and he seemed to have been hiding here ever since.

Somehow, it sort of resembled what may or may not have happened to a certain someone.

Will, as he told them that, was feeling proud of it, and then suddenly started to sob. It was not something unreasonable, the senior adventurers taught him the know-how for adventurers and took care of him even though one of them wore a displeased face. Without confirming their safety, the pathetic him was only able to tremble in fear and wait for help to come, the him who felt relieved because his rescue came while his companions were dead, various feelings continuously emerged and his tears overflowed.

"I-I am d wost. Wuu, aljo evyone ish

ded, I din't ju anyching. Hikk, fer me chu be d cole curvibor... oso, sniff... chu fil relif... I—!"
(I am the worst. Wuu, although everyone is dead, I didn't do anything. Hikk, for me to be the sole survivor... Also, sniff... to feel relieved... I—!)

Will's wails echoed inside the cave. No one could say anything to him. Toward the Will who blamed himself with tears flowing down his face, they didn't know which words would be good for him. The students looked at Will with sorrowful expressions, while Aiko gently patted Will's back. Yue was expressionless as usual, while Shia looked troubled.

But, at the moment Will found

himself at a loss for words, an unexpected person moved. It was Hajime. Hajime, approached Will and gripped Will's collar. He used his inhuman strength to hang him mid-air. Following that, towards the Will who was in pain because he couldn't breathe, Hajime spoke with an unexpectedly permeating voice.

"What is wrong with wanting to live? What is wrong with being glad because you're alive? That wish and feeling are something natural and inevitable. Even more so because you're a human."

"B-but... ... I was...."

"Even so, if you're worried about those who died... ... then continue to live. From now on keep living as

you struggle, and struggle as if you're going to die. If you do that, someday... ... there might come a day when you understand the reason why you survived today."

"... ... Keep living."

Even while crying, Will repeated Hajime's words in blank surprise. Hajime violently threw Will down, he tsukkomi'ed himself with, "What have I done," his words just now, more than half of them were directed towards himself. Will's situation was a little similar to his, and for him to belittle his own life was like saying, "It's wrong for you to survive," towards Hajime, so he was inadvertently angered.

Of course it was just his

persecution complex. More than half of it was said on an outburst of anger, so it wasn't different from a child's tantrum. Even though he had seen through various things, Hajime was still a 17 year old boy, and there was still more for him to learn. Hajime knew he had fallen into slight self-loathing. Having seen such a Hajime, Yue came to his side and grasped Hajime's hand tightly.

"... ... It's okay, Hajime isn't wrong."

"... ... Yue."

"... ... Live to your best. Keep living on. Together with me, right?"

"... ... Haha, ah of course. I'll keep on living no matter what might

happen... ... so, don't leave me alone."

"... ... Nn."

They left Will who was still talking to himself, then Hajime and Yue created a world with just the two of them. He couldn't match Yue, and Hajime gently stroked Yue's cheek, while Yue was also being spoiled and let his hand stroke her cheek. Not understanding what happened to cause such a development, Aiko and her students could only blink, while Shia watched Hajime and Yue with half-opened eyes.

The chaotic situation continued for a while (thanks to Hajime's recklessness), and somehow everyone managed to regain their

senses. The party then decided to immediately descend the mountain. There was still more than an hour before sunset, so if they hurried, they would likely reach the foot of the mountain by the time the sun set.

Although they were concerned about the Brutals and the jet-black Dragon, those were outside Hajime and his party's mission. It was unthinkable to continue the investigation while having to protect those with low combat potential. Will also understood that he would just be a hindrance, so he understood that they must withdraw. Although the students insisted on continuing the investigation because of their slight sense of justice that came from the

troubled townspeople, Aiko stubbornly refused to investigate because of the great danger the Black Dragon and Brutals posed. In the end, they descended the mountain.

However, nothing proceeds smoothly. Once again, they were passionately welcomed when the party got out of the waterfall basin with Yue's magic.

"GUuRURURURU."

Letting out a low groan, with its whole body covered in jet-black scales, its golden eyes glared at them in mid-air while fluttering its wings... ... it was the "Dragon."

Chapter 58: Black Dragon Subjugation?

* * *

The dragon's length was at least seven meters. With its whole body covered in jet-black scales, there were five sharp claws on each of its long forelegs. Big wings grew from its back which were slightly shining as they were clad with magic power. Every time it flapped the wings an unbelievable gust of wind appeared, even after taking the size of it's wings into account. However, its most impressive feature was its golden eyes that floated in the night

like moons. Its eyes that closed vertically like a reptile's, were dangerously narrowed as they released beautiful light.

The golden eyes were glaring at Hajime and the others from the air. A low groan was leaked from the Black Dragon's throat. Its overwhelming power couldn't be compared to the Hyveria he saw at the bottom of Raisen Grand Canyon's ravine. Although Hyverias themselves were generally recognized as troublesome, high level demonic beasts, when compared to the Black Dragon before them, it was as if they were small birds. Its majestic appearance made it suited as the king of the sky.

Just like a frog being stared at by a snake, Aiko and the others stiffened. Will was especially pale faced and gatagata, trembled as if he would collapse at any moment. Inside his mind, he might be having flashback from when he was attacked.

Hajime had already seen the claw marks from the Black Dragon's attack that created branches off the river. He thought it must be a very strong demonic beast, but feeling the magic power and pressure from the Black Dragon in front of his eyes, he revised that it was three times of what he had imagine. Remembering the demonic beasts in the Abyss, it was not as strong as the Hydra, but he could feel that it had the same power as class of

demonic beasts from 90th floor.

The Black Dragon confirmed Will's appearance and girori, sharpened its glare. Following that, in front of the stiffened humans, it slowly lifted its head and concentrated its magic inside the opened jaws where sharp fangs lined up.

KYUuWAaAAA!!

A mysterious timbre began to dye the sunset and reverberated throughout the mountains. Inside Hajime's mind, he remembered the Breath attack that erased the adventurers on the river.

"Kh! Evacuate!"

Having issued the warning, Hajime

immediately leaped away from his location to evacuate. Yue and Shia followed after him. However, some people were unable to react to his warning, no, in this case it could be said most of them.

Aiko, the students, and even Will were stiffened and didn't move from their spots. Aiko and the students' bodies were unable to keep up with such a sudden event, while Will was bound by fear that made him unable to even avert his gaze.

"Tch!!"

"Hajime!"

"Hajime-san!"

Hajime issued an order to Yue and Shia using "Telepathy," then he suddenly returned to his previous location using "Ground Shrinker" and stood between Aiko's party and the dragon. Normally, he'd just leave. He didn't feel bad about abandoning Aiko, rather, he didn't understand why she came here to search for Will who miraculously survived. But, his "job" was to bring him back if he was alive. That's why Hajime couldn't abandon him.

Hajime took out a two meters, coffin-like, large shield from the "Treasure Box" into the empty space, he thrust his left arm and linked it to the shield. As he poured his magic power, on the lower part of the shield gashun!, a stake appeared. Following that, it

mightily pierced the ground.

Immediately, a straight, black, laser-like Breath fired from the dragon. The Breath didn't let out any sound and immediately reached Hajime's large shield. The impact accompanied by a tremendous roar and the heatwave released melted the ground around the large shield.

"Guu! Ooooo!!"

Hajime let out a roar filled with spirit as he resisted the Breath's pressure. Before one was aware, Hajime's body and the large shield let out bright red light. It came from Hajime's "Vajra." However, the Breath seemed to carry greater power, so after he resisted it for a while, his defense was penetrated as

the large shield received a direct hit.

Even so, the large shield still endured the Breath. Power that penetrated Hajime's "Vajra" and heat gradually melted its surface, and it'd fall apart at any time, but Hajime used "Transmutation" to restore it. He wouldn't let any more breakthrough than this.

The stake that penetrated the ground to fix his location was defeated by the pressure, as he gradually pushed back. Hajime transmuted his soles into spikes, and once again, Hajime used Vajra to resist the Breath. The large shield was connected to his outstretched left arm, and he also affixed his right arm to it.

The large shield Hajime took out was using Taur ore as its main material while Star ore was placed in-between and the exterior was coated with Azanthium. Because Hajime was a Transmutation Master, even with an attack that exceed Azanthium's durability, it's possible to restore it if it could endure even for a few seconds. Even if that was penetrated, the Star ore in the second layer had a nature to strengthened if supplied with magic power, and Hajime's magic power wouldn't allow anymore penetration.

That's why, the Breath that could exceed Azanthium wouldn't be able to destroy the large shield. However, it couldn't be said that power wouldn't be able to blown

the large shield's user away. In fact, Hajime who possessed inhuman power was gradually pushed back. On the ground were the gouged out marks from the large shield's stake that pierced it and Hajime's feet.

If this keep up, Hajime who equipped with large shield and "Vajra," along with his inhuman endurance wouldn't receive considerable damage. But if Hajime lost the shield, Aiko and the others would fall prey to the breath, and disappear from this world without even leaving a speck of dust behind.

When Hajime became somewhat impatient, an unexpectedly soft feeling was transmitted to his back. As he stole a glance over his shoulder, somehow, Aiko had

jumped towards his back and supported him desperately. Apparently, while Hajime was resisting the Breath, she regained her senses and jumped to support Hajime who was gradually being pushed back. Having seen that, the students and Will also jumped to support Hajime, in panic.

The Breath continued even now. The surrounding water in the river was evaporated by the heatwave, the soil and stones on the riverbank were blown away by the impact and in awful state. From the time he received the direct hit from the Breath, a little time had passed. Hajime felt it had happen for an eternity, but actually no longer than ten seconds had passed. While he grit his teeth and thought about it,

finally, he heard the long-awaited voice.

""Cursed Sky"."

At the moment the magic's name was announced, a black, swirling orb of four meters in diameter appeared above the Black Dragon. The deep darkness that could suck in anyone who saw it, immediately fell and crushed the Black Dragon into the ground.

"GuuRUaAAA!?"

A roar came as the Black Dragon sprawled on the ground, and its Breath was interrupted when it raised a scream from the impact. However, the swirling orb, as if saying that's not enough, didn't

disappear and exerted extreme pressure on the Black Dragon, sinking it into the ground.

"Cursed Sky"

It was Yue's Gravity magic. By creating a swirling gravity ball, it crushed its target using supergravity that was proportional to the amount of consumed magic power. It was a convenient magic that could change its direction using the gravitational force.

The Gravity magic didn't consume much magic power if targeted towards the caster itself. However, if the gravity ball was used to attack things, space, and other people, just like what happened just now, it consumed huge amount of magic

power and Yue at the least need ten seconds to prepare it. Because Yue herself still hadn't completely master this magic, the invocation time and magic consumption could still become much more efficient by training.

The sky king was crucified on the ground, it painfully braced its limbs to somehow escape from the pressuring attack. But, immediately following that were the rabbit ears that came fluttering from the sky and Shia was shouting, "Stop~!", as she fell together with Doryukken. Holding the sledgehammer which was further accelerated by outburst, she used the high-stance aimed at the Black Dragon's head.

DOoGAaAAA!!!

The impact was incomparable to any impact that had happened before. At the moment of impact, the ground burst and flew radially, accompanied by a thundering sound, it created a crater that looked like a result of a bombing. That was thanks to Doryukken's remodelling by Hajime. Gravity magic was granted to the compressed Azhantium that was the main material. However, it was not the one that "neutralized" like the ones in the unmanned reconnaissance planes, but the opposite where the ore could "increase its weight." The weight increased according to the amount of magic power supplied. The current Doryukken was just like *****ton Hammer!, just like the one

inside the manga.

Furthermore, those who received the ultra-heavy blow wouldn't be able to escape from serious damage. That's right, if it was directly hit....

"Guruaaa!!"

Together with the Black Dragon's roar, a flame bullet approached Yue at tremendous speed from inside the dust that scattered by Doryukken. Yue immediately did an emergency evasion by "falling" to the right. However, the gravity ball magic was canceled instead.

The dust was cleared up as the after-effect of the previous flame bullet, and there was the Black

Dragon who managed to evade Doryukken which sunk to the ground by a paper-thin margin. At the moment of impact, it seemed to somehow evade using the peculiar strength of a dragon. Having its restraints removed, the Black Dragon did one rotation in high-speed as if trying to dispel its grudge and its large mass of a tail hit Shia who was just pulling out Doryukken.

"Agh!!"

By a hair's breadth, Shia used Doryukken as a shield and jumped back to kill the impact, because she was greatly blown away at the same time, she disappeared into the trees.

The Black Dragon used the

momentum from the rotation and recovered its posture, and its golden eyes were glaring at Hajime... ... not, just passed towards Will behind him. Hajime immediately put the large shield back into "Treasure Box," then pulled out Donner-Schlag and fired them. Many roars resounded, accompanied by flashes that cut through the sky and attacked the Black Dragon. Without being able to evade, the Black Dragon received direct hits from the storm of destruction, blown away from its spot, and thrown into the river with a tremor, creating a magnificent sprays.

Because Hajime thought it'd be bad for Will to be in its line of fire, he charged at the Black Dragon. Using gunspin in mid-air to reload

Donner-Schlag in his hands, he repeatedly fired in succession just like before. However, the Black Dragon got up accompanied with roar that scattered the river's water, somehow, it ignored Hajime and fired a flame bullet that was aimed at Will.

"Kh!"

Because it aimed at Willl, Hajime dared to approach it and tried to attack furiously to gain its attention. But, the Black Dragon acted as if it didn't even care if Hajime was there, continue to target Will.

"Yue!"

"Nh "Wave Castle"."

"Hih!", was the miserable scream that came from the cowering Will, and in front of him was high-density wall of water. The flame bullet was obstructed by the rampart-like wall of water created by Yue and disappeared. And, at that time, the students finally regained their senses from this raging development and began to chant their magic. They were trying to support the party. Quickly, fire bullets and wind blades rushed towards the Black Dragon as they created archs.

However....

"GOoAAA!!"

The impact from the dragon's roar

dispersed the attacks. Moreover, having heard the tremendous roar and stared by the golden eyes, Will let out similar "Hih," scream as he backed away and fell on his butt, reaching the female students' spot.

Hajime, who completely judged her to be outside of the combat assets, shouted at Aiko to escape. Aiko was hesitating. Hajime was also Aiko's student after all, so to left him in front of this powerful demonic beast made her hesitate as a teacher.

At that time, the Black Dragon began to flap its wings and flew into the sky while blowing the surroundings river water away. In addition, it rapidly shot flame bullets at Will.

Although Hajime had fired the railguns in quick succession, he couldn't get its attention at all. The Black Dragon's scales, similar to scorpion-like thing that boasted its hardness in the past, was only slightly scratched even after receiving direct hits from the railguns.

The Black Dragon stubbornly targeted Will. It was as if it was being manipulated by something. It faithfully obeyed the order like a robot. It kept trying to kill Will even after being restrained by gravity before, it seemed to think nothing of those who tried to obstruct it.

Although Hajime didn't understand why it obstinately targeted Will, it

was a convenient thing, since its target was already decided, so he gave out an instruction to Yue.

"Yue! Protect Will! I'll defeat this guy!"

"Nh, leave it to me!"

Hearing Hajime's instruction, Yue immediately "fell" towards Will, and stood in front of him. When she snuck a look at her back, irritation surfaced when she saw Aiko and the students who couldn't move well in this situation and she muttered in displeasure.

"... ... If you don't want to die, hide behind me."

The students were trivials, but

regarding Aiko, Hajime was at least concerned about her, so she let out those words to not let her die. Incidentally, she had already forgotten how Aiko became a hindrance to them.

The students moved closer to Yue without particularly reacting to Yue's cold words. They realized by Yue's side was the safest place, thanks to the rampart of ice that chantlessly constructed using the surrounding moisture.

Normally, they'd have the ability to fight some more. But, no matter even if they knew Hajime was alive, the day they were almost killed by the Behemoth and Traum Soldiers as well as how Hajime fell to his "death" into the abyss still

traumatized their minds. They followed Aiko because even if they couldn't join the hero group in the dungeon, they couldn't just half ass things.Even so, their magic was ineffective against the Black Dragon, coupled with the roar filled with killing intent, made their heart completely withered. Their mental state was completely unsuited for combat.

Because Yue was there, Hajime was assured of Will's safety, and concentrated on attacking. The flying Black Dragon was concentrating on destroying Yue's defensive wall, as it targeting Will on the other side of the wall, even now. However, flame bullets were incapable of penetrating the wall, then it raised its head in an arch

again as it realized it. It began to focus magic power inside its mouth.

"Hah, it's the first time I've been ignored this far... ... that's why, I'll do anything to make you not ignoring me!"

As Hajime put back Donner into its holster, he took out Schlagen from the "Treasure Box." Immediately after he activated "Lightning-clad," the three meters weapon with an atrocious form let out bright red sparks. As expected, the Black Dragon realized Hajime's next move was a dangerous one, and it turned its mouth, aiming at Hajime. It was just like Hajime had predicted: it couldn't ignore him.

At the same time the Black Dragon

fired the death spreading Breath, Hajime's Schlagen finished the loading and fired.

They let out the same extreme flash. They became a storm of death. Black and red aurora were clashing against each other. At the moment of collision, a terrific shock wave was generated and the surrounding trees were blown away. Just by power alone, they were probably equal. However, the two auroras clearly divided between the victor and the loser from their nature. Although the Breath continued to let out an excellent aurora, Schlagen was specialized in penetrating through a single point. Therefore, the Breath was inevitably broken through, and that power reached the Black Dragon.

The head of the Black Dragon which fired the Breath suddenly curved upward. The full-metal jacket made out of star ore penetrated the Breath and hit the dragon's opened mouth. However, the wound was far from a mortal one. With the bending of the Breath's trajectory and power, several of its sharp fangs evaporated and as it nearly passed through the side of its head, it stopped before one of its wings on its back was blown off.

"GURUaAAA!!"

The Black Dragon fell as it spun towards the ground and let out a pained scream. Hajime was fortunately able to evade the Breath

using "Aerodynamic," and while he was upside down in mid-air he used "Aerodynamic"'s "Ground Shrinker." As he dived at high-speed, he used "Grand Leg" to attack the Black Dragon's abdomen.

ZUDONh! The lower abdomen let out a roaring sound from the impact, and the Black Dragon's body folded. The ground was radially cracked by the impact. It couldn't be said that the damage was considerable even though the Black Dragon let out a scream. Its armor was capable of enduring the Railguns after all. However, having assumed that, Hajime attacked further as he greatly held out the artificial left arm. KIiIIII!!! Machine-like sounds came from the artificial arm. The "Oscillation

Smash" he used before fell down.

It was Hajime's fist of destruction that was thrust in high speed and was capable of pulverizing a large boulder in a single blow, and it mercilessly attacked the Black Dragon's abdomen.

DOoGUuUU!!

Along with the muffled sound, the scales on the abdomen were cracked. With the purpose of transmitting the impact, its insides received considerable damage from this attack, and the Black Dragon raised a pained voice again as it vomited large amounts of blood from its mouth. Maybe because it thought it'd be dangerous if this kept up, the Black Dragon poured

its magic power in one of its wings and a windstorm appeared, then it tried to forcefully regain its posture. Once again, Hajime used "Aerodynamic" to evade. He didn't forget to leave a parting gift.

At the moment the Black Dragon turned its golden eyes towards Hajime who escaped into the air, a big explosion occurred under its abdomen. The dragon's gigantic figure flew two meters from the surface from the impact. Hajime's parting gift was a "Grenade."

"KUuWAaAA!!"

Receiving an impact at the same place as before, it couldn't be helped that it was unable to raise a scream and only let out a muffled

groan. With its head drooped to endure it, blood was flowing from the Black Dragon's mouth. Somehow, its groan weakened.

Maybe because the Black Dragon recognized Hajime as a threat, it looked away from Will towards Hajime and rapid-fired flame bullets from its mouth. The flame bullets flew through the air as if they were anti-aircraft fire. However, none of the fire hit Hajime. Hajime was using "Aerodynamic" and "Ground Shrinker" simultaneously to freely run in the sky, leaving after-images, Hajime knocked down the Black Dragon using Hit & Away tactic.

He fired Donner-Schlag from medium range at nasty places such

as the claws, gums, eyes, tail's base, and butt. In the next moment, he drew closer and used the combo of "Oscillation Smash" from the shotshell outburst + "Grand Arm" to hit the head and flank.

"KURUu, GUWANN!"

Somewhat, no, the Black Dragon certainly began to give out a weeping voice. With its scales cracked all over the place, a large amount of blood dripped from its mouth.

"Incredible...."

Having watched Hajime's fight, Tamai Atsushi spontaneously muttered that from the safety area behind Yue. Without having to say

it, the other students and Aiko were silently agreeing as they nodded, and they were unable to look away from the overwhelming fight. As for Will, he intensely watched Hajime with sparkling eyes as if he didn't remember he was trembling in front of the Black Dragon before.

By the way, unbeknownst to them Shia had returned and tried to enter combat, only to be stopped by Yue who had guessed Hajime's intentions. Currently, she watched him together with Yue by her side. Having been blown away at the beginning, she actually felt somewhat depressed.

Hajime didn't immediately pull out Schlagen, Orkan, and the others because he thought it was a good

chance to show off his fighting prowess to Aiko and the students. Although the Black Dragon was certainly sturdy and the power of one of its attacks was to be feared, it's easier to attack its huge body if one fought calmly, and its attacks were monotonous. So, it was possible for him to put into practice "no matter what, it won't hit," after all it was an opponent Hajime could go easy on. Because he'd separate from Aiko and the students, to put a hard-line so the Church and Kingdom wouldn't be relaxed when the heroes received the information from Aiko, he thought of showing off his true power to them.

Because of that, although Hajime completely knocked down the pitiful Black Dragon, he held

gratitude towards it in his mind. Even though there were cracks all over the place, none of the scales were completely crushed in the least. Truly significant durability. Because he remembered the scorpion-like thing, to be sure of it, he used "Mineral Appraisal" on the scales and because there was no reaction, it seemed it was a mineral that couldn't be transmutated.

Slowly, because he thought it was enough to make them understand his true strength, it was about time for the finishing blow. He slipped onto the Black Dragon's chest in an instant, and kicked with "Grand Leg" to roll him back towards its abdomen. Following that, he pulled out the Pile Bunker from the "Treasure Box" on the Black

Dragon's abdomen.

From the direction of Will and the others, he could hear a clamor but decided to ignore it. The anchors fired, and the arms fixed its location on the Black Dragon. Following that, he released "Lightning-clad." The reason he chose the Pile Bunker was because he couldn't pull out all of its power inside the Raisen Great Dungeon, so he wanted to do an actual combat test.

The stake which coated in Azanthium started to rotate intensely inside, and the Pile Bunker let out bright red sparks. If this kept up, the four ton stake would mercilessly end the Black Dragon's life.

However, just like the proverb "a cornered rat will bite the cat," a wounded beast was something one should be cautious of. It was the same as the Black Dragon.

"GUuGAaAAAA!!!"

Along with the Black Dragon's roar, a violent blast was generated towards all directions. It was an explosion made of pure magic power. In addition, using a moment to strengthen its body to the limit and the explosive power from its muscles, the anchors that pierced the ground to fix the Pile Bunker were raised and at the same time it pried open the arms with its muscles. Following that, it turned around in an instant to shake Hajime off.

"Uoh!?"

Hajime instinctively stepped back. The heavy Pile Bunker was, the Pile Bunker that was on the verge of firing was turned to target the sky, and the stake that was accelerated to its max launched into the sky. A straight line that made ones narrow their eyes ascended through the sky, and Hajime who put the Pile Bunker into the "Treasure Box" confirmed the Black Dragon used its last struggle to move towards Will.

"Tch, Shia!"
"Y-Yes"

As he clicked his tongue towards this blunder, Hajime called Shia.

Shia, having realized his intentions, jumped towards the sky using the rampart of ice, and let out a yell so she wouldn't be blown away this time. With the free fall and the outburst from the shotshell, she fell towards the Black Dragon just like a meteor.

If it was the normal Black Dragon, it'd be able to avoid it, but the Black Dragon that was literally in its last struggle didn't have room for that, it was unable to avoid the hammer. Shia, who held the ultra-heavy Doryukken in a high-stance, further poured her magic power to explosively increase its weight. Subsequently, it directly hit the crown of the Black Dragon's head without missing an inch as it let out a thundering sound.

The Black Dragon's head sank to the ground, and its lower body floated as it stood on its hands because it was in the middle of a charge. After a moment of stillness, it finally fell down and made the earth tremor.

Shia, who pulled out Doryukken from the Black Dragon's head that was on the ground, was surprised by what she saw. It was something natural. Although the Black Dragon's head was smashed and considerably cracked, it wasn't completely broken. It was truly dreadful durability.

Hajime came towards the Black Dragon from behind. Also, the stake launched from the Pile Bunker

pierced the ground between Hajime and the Black Dragon. Hajime knew the sprawled dragon wasn't dead by percepting its presence, next, he suddenly recalled the talk with Mottou about the Ryujin race from before. The one about "kicking a dragon's ass."

Hajime pulled out the stake that pierced the ground using "Grand Arm" and carried it on his shoulder as he positioned himself before the base of the Black Dragon's tail. Following that, he made a stance just like a javelin thrower. Naturally, in his hand was the Pile Bunker's stake.

Everyone there was able to guess what Hajime was going to do, and their cheeks convulsed. Even

though the scales were troublesome, it shouldn't be a good thing to thrust it there(‥). Even though Yue, Shia, and the others floated expressions of horror towards Hajime's mercilessness, Hajime only thought of that as blowing wind.

And finally, Hajime's Pile Bunker mightily pierced the Black Dragon's "bleep" and zuburi sound resounded. At that moment,

"Ah– – – nanojyaaaaa – – – !!!"

With its eyes immediately opened wide, the Black Dragon let out a heartbreaking scream as it woke up. In truth, having thrust half of the stake and using his fist to make it

pierce further, as expected, even Hajime was surprised by the scream that obviously came from the Black Dragon, and he inadvertently removed his clasped fist.

"Ass is~, this one's ass is~"

Because of the Black Dragon's grieving, painful, and somewhat excited tone, everyone let out a "What the heck is this!?" in amazement as they stared at the Black Dragon while stunned.

Apparently, it didn't end as just a normal dragon subjugation.

Chapter 59: Tio Clarce

* * *

"I-it's pulling~, it's pulling out this one's ass~"

On the mountain side of the northern mountain range, where trees were mowed down and the dried up river was in ruins, a truly miserable voice rang out. It was a woman's voice. A voice that was not spoken, but rang out just like a wide area version of telepathy. Because a dragon's vocal chords and mouth were incapable of speaking human words, it definitely used a method

to transmit words through air vibrations.

However, it was impossible for demonic beasts to speak in human words in the first place. Currently, the only confirmed case was the human-faced fish from somewhere. Even among the general population, there shouldn't be an existence such as a demonic beast capable of understanding human language. Furthermore, the existence of the Black Dragon right before their eyes was strange in and of itself. It was the first thing to ever endure so many shots of Hajime's railguns excluding the ones in Great Dungeons. Moreover, although there were powerful demonic beasts that could fire such Breath, they shouldn't exist around this place. If

they lived here, then the danger should already be widely known.

Therefore, he deduced two possibilities as to why it's here. First: it was possible this Black Dragon came from further than the fifth mountain range, a completely unknown demonic beast. Following that, the other one was....

"You... ... don't tell me, are you from the Ryuujin race?"

"Mu? Indeed. This one came from the prideful Ryuujin race. Isn't that great? Isn't that amazing? That's why, although this one wants to pull it out of this one's ass... ... this one's magic power is about to be cut off. If this one returns to original form in this situation... ...

it'll be awful... ... this one's ass will."

Hajime thought it couldn't be possible, but the Black Dragon replied, saying he was correct. Hajime was surprised in the "edge" of his mind. Just how many times since he coming to this world did he meet "rare existences." Yue was from the Vampire race that should have been annihilated in the wars 300 years ago. Shia was the current generation's atavism, and right before his eyes was the Black Dragon who came from the Ryuujin race, which was believed to have been annihilated more than 500 years ago.

"... ... Why are you in this place?"

While Hajime was still surprised,

Yue continued to ask the Black Dragon. The Ryuujin race was a legend even for Yue. She was interested in whether or not it was the only living one of its race, just like her. The light of curiosity dwelled in her eyes.

"Well, more importantly, the ass... ... the amount of magic power remaining is about... ... eh, ah, please stop! Poking it is not good! The stimulation—! The stimulation—~!"

Because the Black Dragon ignored Yue's question, speaking with a delinquent-like attitude, Hajime said, "You dare to ignore Yue's question, Aa?," while using his fist to drive in the stake sprouting from the Black Dragon's butt. With the

shock directly spreading inside its body, the Black Dragon let out a scream as it writhed. Its dignified appearance as if it was a death god when they first met was just like an illusion because not even a bit of that remained.

"Just why would the should be perished Ryuujin race be here, attacking mere adventurers... ... I also want to hear about that. Normally, I'd just pierce your ass as is, but I'll delay that to hear your story. Well then, tell me briefly."

Hajime thought the actions of this legendary Ryuujin race were too unnatural. Normally he'd be merciless, but he slightly delayed that as he urged it to speak. And he continued to grind the stake with

his hand.

"Ah, kuh, stop grinding it~ nanojya~. I-I'll tell you!"

Hajime's action astonished the surrounding others, but Hajime didn't mind them. Because it couldn't talk if he kept it up, Hajime stopped the grinding. However, his hand was still affixed to the stake. The Black Dragon was relieved when the grinding stopped as it let out a sigh. Following that, it began to talk about its circumstances in a somewhat hurried tone. The captivated tone must be just their imagination.

"This one was being manipulated by someone. This one didn't have any intention to attack thou. The

temporary master ordered this one to find the young man over there and his companion and kill them."

The Black Dragon turned its gaze towards Will. Will was twitching for a moment and his body trembled, then he firmly returned the Black Dragon's gaze. Having seen Hajime's fight, he must have settled something.

"What do you mean?"

"Umu, this one will talk in order. This one...."

When the Black Dragon's talk was summarized, it became something like this.

It seemed this Black Dragon went

out of the Ryuujin race's hidden town for a certain purpose. Its purpose was to investigate the visitors from another world. Although the details were omitted, there was a person with high magic perception inside the Ryuujin race, and it seemed that person perceived a huge magic discharge and some things arrived to this world several months ago.

Although the Ryuujin race had a law which prevented from involving themselves on the surface stage, but just as expected, to leave the the matter of unknown visitors as an unknown was something that'd be dangerous, even for them. After some discussion, they decided to start the investigation.

The Black Dragon before them left the hidden town with the purpose of investigation. Normally, it'd turn into human form after passing the mountain range, then it'd work hard in secretly gathering information, but it thought to rest a little before that, and it seemed to have taken a rest in the vicinity of first and second mountain range. Naturally, it used the Ryuujin race's peculiar magic; "Dragon Form" and turned into the Black Dragon because there were demonic beasts in the surroundings.

And then a man completely covered in black robe from head to toe appeared in front of the sleeping Black Dragon. That man gradually gnawed on the thoughts and mind of the sleeping Black Dragon using

the using a variety of brainwashing and suggestion magic from the dark magic system.

Naturally, if that happened it'd usually counterattack. But the Ryuujin race had a bad habit. That's right, it was the one that became the origin of that proverb. Ryuujin race that entered deep sleep in dragon form wouldn't be easily awaken. However, it was as long as no one kicked its ass. Even so, Ryuujin race boasted the toughness of their willpower, so it shouldn't be easy to manipulate it.

Then, for how it was able to be perfectly manipulated. That was....

"That man is frightening. His aptitude in dark magic can be called

the level of a genius. That man continuously used magic for one full day. So no matter how strong this one is, this one couldn't endured it after all...."

It's the greatest mistake of this one's life!, was the feeling that came from the Black Dragon's sorrowful voice. However, Hajime just tsukkomi'ed that with cold eyes.

"In other words, having come here to investigate, how can you not notice magic being used for a full day, just because you're fast asleep?"

Everyone's eyes look somewhat foolish. The Black Dragon turned its gaze towards the day after tomorrow, and it continued its story

as if nothing happened. By the way, the reason it knew it took a full day was because it was still conscious even after the completion of brainwashing, and heard the culprit grumbling, "For it to take one full day....".

Afterwards, obeying the robed man, it helped brainwash the demonic beasts in the second mountain range. Then, on a certain day, the Brutal army was moved to the first mountain range, and they encountered Will's party who were undertaking the investigation request. Having received the order to kill any witnesses, it chased after them. This one alone reported to the robed man. For some reason, it seemed it'd be bad if the fact he had brainwashed a lot of demonic

beasts was revealed, so he ordered the Black Dragon to do a complete search.

Then, by the time it'd noticed it, it was already knocked down by Hajime, and panicked because she'd be dead if this kept up. That's why it exploded its magic power.

Following that, at the time it was going to do suicide attack according to instructions ingrained in its brainwashed brain. Its consciousness was blown away after Shia's attack. In the next moment, its mind immediately woke up from an indescribable stimulation and impact to its ass. It didn't know whether it was the blow to its head or its ass that made it regain its senses.

"... ... Stop playing around."

Towards the Black Dragon who finished its story came a shaking voice that was desperately trying to suppress its fury. Everyone turned their glances towards that person. With his fists clenched, Will's aimed his anger filled eyes towards the Black Dragon.

"... ... Just because you were manipulated... ... Gale-san was—, Navarre-san was—, Lento-san was—, Waslee-san was—, Kurt-san was—! Killed but that couldn't be helped you say!"

Apparently, he was angry because he understood why the adventurers were killed. He raised a voice filled

with fury towards the Black Dragon.

"... ..."

The confronted Black Dragon didn't raise any rebuttal. It just received all of Will's words with calm eyes as it gazed at him. He was unable to stomach that attitude.

"In the first place, your story can't be proven to be true! You most likely made it up because you didn't want to die!"

"... ... What was spoken just now is the truth. For the Ryuujin race's pride doesn't allow this one to lie."

Now, Will tried to argued vehemently. But, Yue intervened.

"... ... Surely, it didn't lie."
"Kh, what's your basis for saying that...."

Having glanced at the snapped Will, Yue began to talk as she looked at the Black Dragon.

"... ... The Ryuujin race is noble and honest. I've lived much longer from everyone here. That's why I am more familiar with the legend of the Ryuujin race. This one said "For its pride." That's why, it is surely not a lie. Furthermore... ... I know if someone has the eyes of a liar."

Yue slightly moved her gaze away from the Black Dragon as she looked at the distance sky. Surely, she was reminded of the event 300 years ago. For the aloof princess,

her surroundings had set her up and remembering the result, surely there were a lot of lies involved. Even the most familiar person to her could be called "liars." The result of her constantly looking away from that fact was the "betrayal." Therefore, for Yue, who had experienced the bitterness called the "study of life," her eyes were sensitive to "liars." Although the reason she entrusted herself when she first met Hajime was because there was no other way, and although Hajime never lied to her, when she was reminded of that time, her sensitivity to liars might have been the biggest contributing factor after all.

"Fumu, for someone to still know of the Ryuujin race's ideals... ... No,

didn't thou say a long time ago?"

For someone to still know the ideals of the existence called the Ryuujin race, the Black Dragon's tone was somewhat joyous.

"... ...Nn. I am a survivor of the Vampire race. 300 years ago, I was heard the Ryuujin race was the ideal example of nobility."

"Wow, Vampire race's... ... Moreover 300 years ago... ... Indeed, although this one heard they were dead, thou are the Vampire princess. Surely thy name is...."

Apparently, the Black Dragon was alive for more or less the same amount of time as Yue. Moreover, its words implied that it knew of

what had happened in the world. Even now, they might still hide their identities and are investigating the world. But, the Black Dragon seemed surprised that the Vampire Princess had survived. The surrounding, Will, Aiko, and the students were also looked at Yue with eyes of astonishment.

"Yue... ... that's my name. It's the name I got from my most important person. So, I'd like you to call me that."

Yue gestured as though she were embracing something closely with both hands as her cheecks blushed faintly. For Yue, the Ryuujin race was an existence that should be taken as an example. So, the edge of her spoken words were filled with

respect. That feeling must also have been involved in how she stopped Will's disparagement.

In Yue's surroundings, an aura of happiness somehow drifted around. Because of the abrupt love talk, the female students wore expressions as though they had eaten something sweet, while the male students were blushing because of Yue's charm as they looked at her. Even Will seemed to have lost some of his vigor.

However, he continued to speak because he still regretted what had happened to the senior adventurers.

"... ... Even so, that doesn't change the fact that it killed them,... ... but even I don't know what should be

done... ... Even so—! Gale-san was going to propose when this job ended... ... their regrets..."

He knew in his head that the Black Dragon's words weren't a lie. However, he couldn't help but blame it. His heart just couldn't accept it. Inside Hajime's mind, "Once again, a splendid flag was raised huh," with weird admiration. Then he recalled the locket pendant they had picked up on the way.

"Will, is this that Gale's belonging?"

As he said that, he threw the locket pendant to Will. Will received it, he looked at it then he smiled as if he was truly happy.

"This, this is my locket pendant! I

thought I had lost it, but you picked it up. Thank you very much!"

"Huh? It's yours?"

"Yes, it's not a mistake because there's mama's photograph!"

"Ma-Mama?"

His expectation came off splendidly, and the answer even made Hajime's cheeks cramp inadvertently.

Because the woman in the photograph should be in the first half of her twenties, he was doubtful but he heard, "After all, the photograph of mama in her youth is the best." as Will answered as if it was some kind of divine revelation. Everyone there realized, "Aa, mama-

con huh," as they wore subtle expressions. The females looked more and more subtle....

By the way, Gale's other party seemed to be a "man." Following that, Gale's fullname was Gale Homoluca. It was just as the say that the name influenced the body.

Maybe because he regained his mother's photograph, Will considerably calmed down. It's effectiveness was truly an unknown. But, even if he was calmed down, his grudge and pain didn't disappear. Will, calmly, insisted to kill the Black Dragon. Moreover, even though it said it was brainwashed, he reasoned that it was completely faking it. His main reason should be revenge.

Then, as if to repent, the Black Dragon spun its words that contained guilt in its voice.

"Even if this one was manipulated, it is true that this one is guilty for plucking the precious life of people. To make up for it, this one will obediently received the judgement. However, this one want you to delayed that for a while. At the very least, until that dangerous man is stopped.That man is trying to make an army of demonic beasts. Although Ryuujin race's law doesn't allow any interference against the continent's fate, this one was responsible. This one can't just leave it... ... This one know it is just this one's selfishness. But, please somehow overlook that."

Hearing the Black Dragon words, everyone in that place were surprised when they heard about the army of demonic beasts. Naturally, everyone's gazes focused on Hajime. These members were naturally looked at their leader. Actually, because Hajime was the one who stopped piercing the Black Dragon, they naturally entrusted the decision to him.

Hajime's answer was,

"Well, I don't really know about your circumstance. But, it'll be a troublesome so I'll ignore it. Die as an apology."

He swung the fist of his artificial arm as he said that.

"Wait—! Th-Thou, with the flow of the talk, thou shouldn't have done the finishing blow as if no discussion is necessary! Please! This one will apologize without fail! This one don't mind whatever thou do when that matter is over! That's why delay it for now! The afterlife will—!"

Hajime continue to swung his fist as he ignored the Black Dragon's words with cold eyes. However, he couldn't finished that. At the moment he swung it, Yue clung on to Hajime's neck. Surprising him, Yue whispered to Hajime's ears as she instinctively held him.

"... ... Are you going to kill?"

"Eh? Well, we were trying to kill each other...."

"... ... But, it's not an enemy. Killing intent and malice were never turned towards us. It was deprived of it's will."

Apparently, Yue didn't wanted the Black Dragon to die. For Yue, Ryuujin race was something she yearned for, so she respected it.

Moreover, even though he said they were trying to kill each other, from the beginning, the Black Dragon never turned its killing intent and malice towards Hajime and the others. They understood the reason now. With it's will literally deprived, it only did as ordered just like a machine. Even so, there was no

change with how they tried to kill each other. However, in the first place, Will was the only one in the Black Dragon's eyes, and the reason it battled Hajime was because the Black Dragon confronted Hajime's intent to kill.

Further saying, Hajime would be inconvenienced if Will was dead, so certainly it was an enemy because it aimed at Will, but the one behind the Black Dragon was the robed man. Then, if he were to talk about who the enemy was, it'd be more likely to be that man.

Also, there was a reason for her to stop him.

Yue knew Hajime's stance. But, in Yue's eyes, "enemy" that should be

killed and the Black Dragon weren't the same thing. Because she was the ruler of the Vampire race, having experienced such things, her eyes wouldn't be mistaken about a person. In Yue's eyes, there were no essence of "enemy" inside the Black Dragon's mind. For Yue, she at least didn't want Hajime to kill things other than the "enemy,"

After all,

"... ... If one compromised on the important rule imposed to themselves, one would be broken. Wouldn't your rule changed if you kill the Black Dragon?"

She was worried that Hajime would be "broken" if he killed things beside the "enemy."

Having received Yue's words, Hajime could guess her mind, and he thought more and more carefully if the Black Dragon was the "enemy" as he slightly inclined his neck. Even if it was manipulated, Hajime was not so naive to considered that in a fight to death. He would have most likely killed it without mercy.

However, after it regained its mind and the brainwashing was dissolved, to purposely execute it with "enemies will be killed," he thought, isn't that a deviation?

As she clung on Hajime's neck, Yue was watching him closely and looked like they'd kiss at any moment, and having thought of

that, unexpectedly, it spoke with a quiet desperate tone.

"This one is sorry to intrude on such good atmosphere, but even if thou feel lost, at the very least could thou pull out the stake from this one's ass? If this keep up, this one will be dead no matter what will happened."

"Nn? What do you mean?"

"Having received the external thing while in dragon form, at the time this one returned to original form, it'd influence the body as is. Try imagining it. The scene of this stake piercing a woman's ass... ... Do you think this one will survive that?"

Everyone in the area imagined the

scene that the Black Dragon said, then "Uwa~," their expressions cramped. Especially the females, they hold their butts as they turned pale.

"Well, although the dragon form could be maintained using magic power, this one's magic power almost exhausted. In a minute... ... although it isn't bad to go to a new world, please pardon this one from that kind of death. The afterlife without it unplugged—"

Somewhat, its words seemed anxious, and its tone weakened as if its limit was truly close, and apparently Hajime didn't have more time to think.

Hajime embraced Yue with his right

arm, and decided rather than hesitating, he'd go along with his partner words as is. For people, they wouldn't be able to understand their own selves. That's why, it wouldn't be a mistake to choose the direction where his trusted partner wouldn't feel uneasy.

Having thought that, Hajime carefully put his hand on the stake which was stucked in the Black Dragon's ass. Following that, he used his strength to pull it out.

"Haaan! P-Please do it slowly. This one still inex- afuuun. Yah, how intense! If this– Aanh! Comingg, something is coming~"
Because it stuck hard inside, he twisted it for so many times, and he put considerable power while

twisting it to pull it out, but somehow the Black Dragon began to let out a captivated voice as it panted. Hajime ignored that voice and pulled it out without any mercy.

ZUBOh!!

"Ahiii— — —!! A-amazing... ... Even though this one said to do it gently, to be treated without any mercy... ... This is the first time...."

As the Black Dragon muttered unknown things, immediately, its body completely wrapped with cocoon-like, jet-black magic power, and its big size began to decreased. Following that, after it reached the size of a human, the magic power immediately disappeared.

In the place of the black-colored magic power was something collapsed on its feet, and while using one hand to support its body, the other hand was holding its butt. With blushing cheeks, it was a black-haired, golden-eyed beautiful girl. Her glossy, straight, black hair reached her waist and her cheeks dyed bright red, Haa haa, she breathed roughly as if she was in a trance.

Her appearance was in the first half of her twenties, and her height might be around 170 cm. With a splendid proportion one could be proud of. Every time she breathed, a pair of hills were intensely shook as they peeped from inside the clothes' collar that became disordered as it

hanged on her, and it looked like they'd came out at any moment. If Shia was melon, the Black Dragon was watermelon....

The Black Dragon's real form was a captivating beauty and the males were especially reacted grandly to that. The three male students in adolescent were somewhat slouching. If this keeps up they'd likely go on all fours. The female students were looking at them with eyes as if they were no different from cockroaches.

"Haa haa, umuu, this one still alive... ... Although there is still a sense of discomfort on the ass... ... this one's whole body is hurting in all places... ... Haa haa... ... for pain to be this sweet...."

The Black Dragon wore a dangerous expression and let out a dangerous words for some reason, then she pulled herself together as she immediately straightened her sitting position and began to introduce herself in such cold atmosphere. Still, she sometimes panted, haa haa, and messed various things, but....

"This one have troubled thou. With all of this one's might, this one apologize. This one's name is Tio Clarce. A person that came from the last tribe of Ryuujin race, Clarce tribe."

The Black Dragon introduced herself as Tio Clarce, next, she talked on how the black robed man

was going to attack the town with an army of brainwashed demonic beasts. Their number had reached around 3,000 to 4,000. Also, from the second mountain range, the leaders of groups of demonic beasts were already brainwashed, so he could use the groups more efficiently as his subordinates.

When she said about controlling demonic beasts, it reminded Hajime and the others about the new power of the one called Demon Race in this world. Maybe because Aiko and the students also thought of that, they guessed the black robed man was actually from Demon race.

However, their guess was easily refuted by Tio. After all, the black robed man was black-haired, black-

eyed human, and still at the age of a boy. Moreover, from the mouth of the Black Dragon called Tio, who was made as a subordinate to him came the settling words, "That person introduced himself as a hero," with a tone filled with considerably grudge against the so called hero.

A black-haired, black-eyed human boy, moreover he was someone with genius-like talent on dark magic. With this much hints, a certain person came to their minds. Aiko and the students muttered, "That, can't be...," at the same time as they showed mixed and complexed expressions. Though it didn't limited to pure black, they said as they didn't wanted to believed it.

And, Hajime suddenly leaked a mutter, "Ooh, this is...," as he looked at the distance. If ones asked, having heard Tio's story, he seemed to have looked for the groups of demonic beasts and the black robed man using the unmanned probes.

Following that, the unmanned probes finally discovered a certain place where the demonic beasts army was. They numbered....

"That's, not at the level of 3,000 to 4,000, you know? It's at the level which one more digit should be added."

Everyone opened their eyes wide after they heard Hajime's report. Moreover, the army had started

their march. The direction was surely towards Ul town. As they were, they'd came out of the mountain in a half day, and they'd likely reached the town in a day.

"W-We must quickly inform the town—! Tell them to take shelter, called the rescue from Imperial capital,... ... then, then...."

Because it was a serious situation, Aiko desperately tried to arranged her words in confusion. No matter if the enemies were tens of thousand demonic beasts, even with their cheat-like specs, the students carried a trauma. Aiko didn't have any combat experience, while Will, who inspired to be an adventurer, and Tio who exhausted her magic power wouldn't even became an

obstacle for the enemies. That's why, just as Aiko had said, they must quickly inform the town of the emergency, then it'd be the best to run away until the rescue from the Imperial capital came.

And, among everyone who was shaken, Will suddenly muttered.

"Umm, if it's Hajime-dono something can be...."

With those words, everyone looked at Hajime. Their eyes were dyed in expectation of the possibility. Having stared at like that, Hajime shook her hand gloomily, and replied with a feeling of abandonment.

"Don't look at me with such eyes.

My work is only to take Will back to Fhuren. As if I will take the object of protection into a war. That's why you should stop that and immediately return to the town to report."

The students and Will could feel the antipathy from Hajime's unmotivated attitude. Among them, Aiko asked a question with an expression as if she remembered something.

"Nagumo-kun, did you find the black robed man?"

"Nn? Well, although I am checking the groups since a while ago, I didn't see any human's shadow."

Having heard Hajime's words, Aiko

looked down again. Following that, potsuri, she said she wanted to remained here to confirmed if the black robed man was Shimizu Yukitoshi who currently missing or not. It was because Aiko always thought of her student. She'd likely unable to do anything if the current situation was caused by her own student, after all.

However, they couldn't leave Aiko at the place where several ten thousands of demonic beast were, so Sonobe and the students desperately tried to persuade Aiko. But, Aiko still hesitated. Among them, then how if Nagumo also goes... ... they began to think like that. Already, Hajime thought the talk about returning and not returning as they stopped in this

place as a hassle, so he turned a cold look towards Aiko.

"Remain here if you want. We are going to take Will along to the town."

As he said that, he gripped Will's collar and dragged him as he began to descended the mountain. Will, Aiko, and the students tried to object in a panic. Their reason, they couldn't leave the army of demonic beasts as is, they wanted to confirmed who the black robed man was, and the army could be defeated by Hajime....

Hajime let out a sigh and looked back Aiko and the others with somewhat irritated look.

"Didn't I already said it, my job is to protect Will. Taking along the protection target into battle against that army is something I won't do.. For example, even if I have to do it, the obstacle would be too big and it'd be a battle of annihilation for me alone. By no means would I want to suffer like that. Furthermore, if you go to confirm the black robed man's identity, then who will report this matter to the town? If by chance we are annihilated, the town will be devoured by a surprise attack, you know? By the way, the magic-driven two-wheeler can only be moved by me, so it'd be impossible for the others to return earlier if I fight, kay?"

Having heard the logical counter to

their demands, Aiko and the others were speechless as he pointed how futile their demands were.

"Well, just as Mas—... ... Kohonh, just as he said. Because this one has exhausted her magic power, this one can do nothing. So, the top priority is to inform the town about the emergency. If this one rests for one day, this one will recover considerably."

Because everyone kept silent, Tio spoke to back him up. Just a little, she called Hajime in a strange way... ... but it must have been their imagination. Aiko also knew that it'd be the best to temporary stopped worrying about Shimizu, and she decided to give priority to secure the safety of the students by

her side.

Tio was unable to moved due to magic power exhaustion, so Hajime dragged her by her neck root. Actually, the male students said someone should carried Tio on their backs as they grandly scattered sparks among themselves, but that was rejected by the female students. And because Tio herself have wished it, she was somehow carried by Hajime.

However, rather than on his back, it was Hajime's characteristic to not hold her. As he frowned because it was a hassle, he suddenly gripped Tio's foot and began to dragged her.

Because of the protests from Aiko and the others, he reluctantly

changed it to gripping her neck root, and dragged her just like before. No matter what Hajime did, it resulted in Tio, who somehow floated an ecstatic expression that made the surroundings shuddered, and they descended the mountain as is.

The party, with dark cloud and an army behind them, rushed to return to the Ul town.

Chapter 60: Sensei's Talk

* * *

The magic-driven four-wheeler dashed out at faster speed than when they'd departed, but the land-leveling function couldn't keep up, so Tio, who was crucified on the ceiling, received the impact. The male students in the carrier received a mixer-like shaking.

Then, at that time, he discovered the fully-armed bodyguard Knights who fiercely drove their horses in the area between the town of Ul and northern mountain range.

Hajime's "Farsight" could see David in the lead wearing an oni-like expression while Chase who was beside him couldn't hide his frustration as they swiftly rode.

Having ran for a while, they discovered a black object that created a clamor as it moved. It was natural for them to think what they saw was a demonic beast. With their weapons drawn, they changed their formation. Their response speed was fast, and indeed, it was clear how they were praised as the VIP's bodyguards.

In particular, even if he was going to be attacked, Hajime didn't have any problem to just charge past them, but Aiko didn't know that because she thought it'd be a

serious matter if Tio, who raised a bewitching and charming scream, and the pale male students were exposed to such attacks. She showed her face through the sunroof and desperately waved her hands as she shouted at David to notice her.

As they drew near, David tried to invoke his magic. He narrowed his eyes as he could see a human-like figure suddenly spring up above the black object that came in high speed. Normally, he'd do a preemptive strike as there was nothing to argue about, but something inside him told him to stop. It could be said that it was his sixth sense exclusive to Aiko, the so-called high-sensitivity Aiko sensor.

With his hand held out, he sent his subordinates the signal to stop their attacks. Although the subordinates were suspicious about it, they became wide-eyed as they heard the familiar voice from the human-like thing that grew out of the top of the black object as it approached them. David had already displayed an expression as if he couldn't believe it and muttered, "Aiko?"

For a moment, don't tell me Aiko's lower half was eaten by that demonic beast!?, as David and the others became pale, but Aiko waved her hands energetically and said, "David-sa~n, it's me! Please don't attack us~!", with a voice full of life.

They understood that they had

misunderstood the situation, and they let out joyful expressions at this reunion because the one on the black object was undoubtedly the person they held dear. As if he was drunk on the situation, David greatly spread his arms with an expression that said "Come! Jump into my arms!" Chase and the others at his sides also spread their arms as if saying, "Jump to me—!"

Seeing the Knights' appearances with their hands spread, Hajime looked displeased. Although Aiko and the students thought Hajime would obviously stop before David and the Knights... Hajime suddenly poured more magic power, and they accelerated.

Because they were at a distance

where deceleration was absolutely necessary, the Knights became stupefied when the black object accelerated further, and moved away in panic.

Hajime's magic-driven four-wheeler just passed David and the Knights who spread their hands in smiles. Aiko could only shout, "Why?," that became smaller because of the Doppler effect, while David and the Knights just hardened and smiled as is. After that, in the next moment they screamed, "Aikoo~!," just like those separated from their lovers, and began to fiercely run after the four-wheeler.

"Nagumo-kun! Why, why did you do such a dangerous thing!?"

Aiko became angry, getting back into the vehicle and fiercely protested against Hajime.

"There's no reason to stop, Sensei. If we stop, they'd likely ask about the situation. Do we have such time? We'll explain the situation in town after all, so there's no need to do it twice, right?"

"Uh, th-that's true..."

She was somewhat convinced, the things about them slipping out without permission and Hajime's four-wheeler would certainly take too much time, so Aiko shut her mouth. Yue, who got back into her seat, drew her face to Hajime's ear and asked him.

"... Real intention?"
"Those smiling Knights made me feel unpleasant."
"... Nn, same here."

By the way, right behind the Aiko poking her face out of the sunroof, was Tio tied up on the vehicle. An expression of ecstasy floated across her face because her damaged body continued to be stimulated by the vibration of vehicle's frame, but it seemed the Knights and Aiko didn't see her.

In addition, when they arrived at the town, Yue who knew of Tio's disgraceful behavior said "... is this, the Ryuujin race?," as she raised a slightly shocked expression. Since the first time Tio released her Dragon Form at the Northern

Mountain range, she was in a subtle mental state and seemed to "feel" the pain, that's why Yue finally broke free from her illusion-like respect and yearning towards the Ryuujin race.

* * *

Arriving at the town of Ul, Hajime and his party calmly walked, while Aiko and the others were running towards the town headman's place. Hajime thought of parting with Aiko and the students here and quickly taking Will back to Fhuren, but he reluctantly followed them because Will had started running before Aiko and the students.

The town was full of liveliness. The dishes came in wide varieties and abundantly, and the town was near a lake. It was the location where people and nature gathered. No one would ever dream that this town would be trampled by an army of demonic beasts in a day. Hajime and his party were looking at such a town, remembering they didn't have any meals since yesterday, so they advanced towards the town hall as they enjoyed skewers from a stall.

Hajime and his party finally arrived at the town hall, and the place was already in a commotion. The branch head of Ul's town guild, town executives, and the priests from the church were gathered and in a state of uproar. All of their expressions showed they couldn't

believe and didn't want to believe the information brought by Aiko, the students, and Will as they closely questioned them.

Normally, they'd just put it off as nonsense from a madman if they heard tomorrow the town would be annihilated, but they were words that came from Aiko the "God's Apostle," and also known as the "Goddess of Good Harvest." That was followed by the recent fact that the Demon race was capable of manipulating demonic beasts, so they couldn't just ignore this information.

By the way, from the discussion inside the vehicle, Aiko and the students had agreed to hide Tio's true form and there was a

possibility of Shimizu Yukitoshi being the mastermind behind this. It's undesirable for the Ryuujin race's existence to be exposed, so Tio asked them to stay silent about this, and the mastermind's identity was just a possibility, so Aiko didn't want to carelessly convey it.

Aiko somehow or another agreed to conceal the information about the existence of the Ryuujin race because the race is something half-taboo for the Church of Saints, and it'd only cause chaos followed by the formation of a subjugation unit.

Within such commotion, Hajime came towards Will. He only thought of the surrounding chaos as blowing wind.

"Oi, Will. Don't just run all of a sudden. Remember that you're under my protection. If you're done reporting, let's quickly go back to Fhuren."

With Hajime's words, Will, Aiko and the others were surprised as they looked at Hajime. The others, the town leaders seemed to feel displeased as they looked at Hajime interrupting the emergency discussion, as if saying "Who the hell is this?"

"Wh-What are you saying? Hajime-dono. It's a time of emergency now, right? Don't tell me, you're going to desert the town..."

Will started arguing with Hajime with an expression as if he couldn't

believe what he'd just said, and Hajime replied with an expression as if he expected this hassle.

"Deserting or whatever it is, in the end, aren't you also going to abandon the town, take shelter, and wait for rescue to come? I'm already aware of this town's defenses from sightseeing... if you want to take shelter, it'd be okay to go to Fhuren. For a while now you've only talked about quickly evacuating the people."

"Th-That's... right... but, I can't just run away by myself in such a serious situation! Even I should have something I can help with. Even Hajime-dono..."

"Hajime-dono, please cooperate

too," was the continuation of Will's words, but his words were interrupted as he was frozen by Hajime's cold eyes.

"... Do I need to speak more clearly to make you understand? My job is to take you back to Fhuren. I don't have anything to do with this town. Listen, I won't hear your opinion. If you still don't want to go... I'll just crush your limbs and drag you back."

"Wh—, th-that's..."

From Hajime's atmosphere, Will guessed those words were serious as he turned pale. His expression said he couldn't believe it. Hajime, who could overwhelm the dragon that easily annihilated veteran

adventurers like Gale's party, looked a little like a hero to Will. That's why even if he was merciless, Will unconditionally believed Hajime would somehow help the townspeople under such an emergency. That's why Will felt betrayed by the cold words thrown out by Hajime..

As he was at a loss for words, Will unconsciously distanced himself from Hajime, but Hajime decided to approach him. Because of such a strange atmosphere, the surrounding people could only alternate looks between Hajime and Will without moving. Then someone suddenly moved and blocked Hajime.

It was Aiko. She immediately

looked up straight at Hajime with a resolute expression.

"Nagumo-kun. If it's you... can't you do something about the army of demonic beasts? No... you can do it, right?"

Aiko's voice carried conviction, he can do something if it's Hajime. In other words, she declared he would be able to save the town. With those words, the surrounding town leaders started to make noise.

If they were to believe the reported threat from Aiko and the others, the enemies were tens of thousands of demonic beasts. Furthermore, they gathered from several mountain range areas. That meant it was on the scale of a war. Consequently, an

individual wouldn't be able to influence the war. That's common sense. To overturn such common sense, there was a special existence even among the ones summoned from another world, that's a Hero. But, it didn't really mean he could win alone against an army. What it meant was leading the human race and together with his companions, simply using quantity. That's why they couldn't believe the boy in front of them who wasn't even a Hero could do something, even if those words came from Aiko. Even if they were words from the "Goddess of Good Harvest"

Towards Aiko's powerful gaze, Hajime waved his hands gloomily as he tried to deceive her by denying it.

"No no, Sensei. Isn't that impossible? Aren't there more than 40,000 of them? It'll be very, very —..."
"But, at that time in the mountain, you didn't say it was "impossible" when Will-san asked if Nagumo-kun could do something about it. Also, didn't you say "the obstacle would be too big and it'd become a fight till the last one standing for me alone"? To put it plainly, there's a possibility it'd become a fight till the last one standing, right? Did I hear it wrong?"

"... What good memory"

Because of Aiko's good memory, Hajime's face distorted as he awkwardly said that. He didn't

regret what he'd said. Aiko requested with a more serious expression to Hajime who averted his face.

"Nagumo-kun. Can't you somehow lend us your power? If this keeps up, not only will this beautiful town be destroyed, a lot of lives will surely be lost."

"... How unexpected. I thought you held students as your top priority. Even all the things you've done were inevitably because there's the possibility it'd be able to return you even a bit earlier, right? Nevertheless, for the sake of unfamiliar people, you are trying to send a student to his death? You don't have the intention, but it's as though you're just like those guys

from the church who tried to spur us to war, you know?"

Hajime's words were full of ridicule, but Aiko was still the same. Her expression was not the worried expression from just a minute ago, it was a resolute and "teacher"-like expression. There were priests from the church who listened to Hajime and Aiko's conversation nearby. They frowned and watched him with narrowed eyes because Hajime's words were full of disdain towards the church. That's why Aiko didn't move from her spot as she straightened her gaze and posture.

"... If there's a method to return to our original world, I'd quickly return the students, and my feelings

haven't changed even now. But, if that's impossible... then, we are living in this world now, the words we exchanged and the people who smiled at us, at the very least I don't want to abandon the people within my reach. Thinking like this is natural as a human. Of course because sensei is a teacher, my priority will not change even under such an emergency..."

Aiko spun her words of confirmation one by one.

"Nagumo-kun, you're calm even now, that's why I think you've experienced something beyond our imagination, to become like this. That's why I feel that you have the composure to think about other people. The words of a teacher who

couldn't be by your side when you were most hurt... might be too light for you. But, please hear me out, somehow."

Hajime kept quiet as is, and he returned Aiko's gaze, urging her to continue.

"Nagumo-kun. Last night, didn't you say you'll absolutely return to Japan? Then, Nagumo-kun. Are you going to return to Japan with everyone important to you except the ones who obstruct you? Are you going to leave everyone who becomes a hindrance to you? Will you be able to live like that in Japan? When you return to Japan, will you change your way of life? The reason sensei didn't want the students to actively fight is because

I am concerned if they would be able to return to their old lives when they returned to Japan. Killing is... , I don't want you to become accustomed to that."

"..."

"Nagumo-kun, you have your own sense of values, your choice for the future is your own. In addition, you don't have the obligation to hear the words from sensei's mouth. But sensei thinks that no matter what kind of future you choose, the way of living which casts others away, other than those important to you... is a truly "lonely" one. Surely, that way of living will not make you and the ones important to you happy. If you wish for happiness, at least for those within your reach... please

don't forget how to sympathize with them. From the very beginning, that's the important and priceless thing you once had... so don't throw it away."

One by one, Aiko spun words filled with her feelings, and she tried to convey all of them in front of Hajime. The leaders of the town and even the students heard Aiko's words in silence. Especially the students. They looked down as if they were scolded as they felt bad they got carried away by their power. At the same time, because Aiko was serious about bringing them back even now, and even thought about how they'd live afterwards. With newfound feelings, they could be seen smiling happily as if something tickled

them.

For Hajime, even if he crossed the worlds, no matter what the situation would be and even if the students had completely changed. Aiko who didn't even deviate from a "teacher" made him smile wryly inside. It wasn't out of contempt, but admiration. Aiko was treated special because of her rare value. She didn't experience Hajime's hardships, so he'd easily refute her with "Even though you don't know anything!," or "Don't spout things as if you know them!" In a way it's just like what Aiko had said, her words were "light."

But, Hajime couldn't do that. Even now the "teacher" was looking straight at him, so to refute them as

"light" words would be too unsightly. Moreover, Aiko hadn't even once pressured him about the "right" thing to do. All of her words were only for the sake of wishing for Hajime's future and happiness.

Hajime immediately turned his gaze towards Yue at Aiko's side. Yue somehow looked at Aiko as if feeling nostalgic. However, when she noticed Hajime's gaze, she immediately matched him straight with a serene gaze. Her eyes said that she'd adhere to whatever answer Hajime gave.

Inside the Abyss, she was his precious person who held his humanity right before he "fell," that's why Hajime certainly wished for her happiness. He thought it'd

be okay if he did it by himself, but if he were to believe Aiko's words, Hajime's way of life wouldn't be able to make Yue happy.

When he changed his gaze further, he found the rabbit-eared girl who looked at him worriedly. Towards his world which narrowed to only Yue and him, she was the girl who brought liveliness. No matter how many times Hajime treated her unkindly, she desperately chased after him curiously, and now she was just like Yue, someone he loved as a friend and companion. For Hajime to accept Shia, didn't it bring happiness to Yue?

For Hajime, this world was like a prison. A cage that obstructed him from returning to his hometown.

Therefore, it was extremely difficult for him to accept the people and everything in this world. Inside the Abyss, he discarded everything for the sake of returning, it wouldn't be an easy thing to change the sense of values carved in his mind which wouldn't forgive those who obstructed him. But even if it was difficult to "sympathize with other people," he could do it. As a result, his precious things... if that'd bring happiness to Yue and Shia, he wouldn't be that stingy to pitch in and help.

Hajime didn't agree to all of Aiko's words. Even so, it was a serious "scolding" from "his teacher." To disregard it as nonsense would be too childish. WIth this time's rampage, the possibility of the

trouble of Hajime's existence being published would suddenly become bigger, but it'd be okay to work hard as just "Aiko-sensei"'s student. Whatever he chose, he already knew he'd be marked sooner or later. He had prepared to strike all of the troublesome things, he decided not to respect this world. That's why it wouldn't be bad to flashily show off his power.

With that, he thought a while for an excuse, then Hajime looked at Aiko again.

"... Sensei, no matter what happens after this, are you still my teacher?"

What Hajime implied was if she'd be his ally.

"Of course."

Towards that, Aiko replied without hesitating.

"... Whatever my decision? That's, even if the result isn't what sensei hoped?"
"That doesn't have to be said. Sensei's role isn't to decide the students' future. I'll just help to make a better decision. Nagumo-kun has heard sensei's talk, so I won't refute your decision"

Hajime watched Aiko for a while to confirm whether there was a lie in her words. For him to intentionally have such commitment was because Hajime himself didn't want to become hostile towards Aiko. After he confirmed there's neither

lie nor deception in Aiko's eyes, Hajime turned towards the entrance. Yue and Shia immediately followed after him.

"Na-Nagumo-kun?"

Seeing such a Hajime, Aiko panickedly called him. Hajime looked back, he shrugged his shoulders and replied, having been beaten by Aiko's "teacher style."

"As expected, to take on a huge crowd of tens of thousands as opponents, I'll need some time to prepare. Continue your discussion without me."

"Nagumo-kun!"

Aiko's face shone because of

Hajime's reply. Hajime could only smile wryly at such an Aiko.

"It is advice from the best "teacher" I've ever known. Moreover, if it's connected to these girls' happiness... I only need to consider it a bit. Anyway, I'll just kick those guys around for now."

As he said that, he patted Yue and Shia's shoulder, then once again he turned his heels and went out of the room. Yue and Shia raised a truly joyful atmosphere, and began to run after Hajime in small steps.

Patan, the sound of the door being closed, the leaders of the town who shut their mouth after being drowned by the atmosphere between Aiko and Hajime, and

immediately asked about the situation from Aiko.

Aiko, whose shoulders were shaken, stared at the door which Hajime went out of. Her face didn't transmit any joy towards Hajime. What she said to Hajime were Aiko's true feelings, that his way of life was a sad one.

But, in the end, there's no denying that she made an important student confront an army of demonic beasts. While she said she didn't want them to grow accustomed to using their power, she was conscious of the contradiction she'd made by sending him off to fight. She thought she wanted Hajime to rethink his way of life, but she also thought of wanting to help the

townspeople of Ul. As a result, both of them seemed to be fulfilled... but she wanted to search for better ways. Aiko secretly let her shoulders droop because of her helplessness as a teacher.

She prayed, for all of her students to not lose their hearts, and to return to their homes... but, Aiko's wish couldn't be fulfilled. After hearing Hajime's story last night, Aiko herself felt that her wishes were already just an illusion. However, she couldn't stop wishing for it.

Surrounded by the leaders who raised a ruckus and the students who looked at her in respect and affection, Aiko didn't realize she let out a sigh.

By the way, Tio who had come to the town hall with Hajime and his party muttered, "Although this one is an important witness... i-is this neglect play... as expected of Mas—", with a flushed expression, and she was naturally ignored.

Chapter 61: Goddess Advent?

* * *

Ul town. The mountain range area in the North and Uldeia lake in the West brought abundant resources to the town. Currently, the town was encircled by an "outer wall" that didn't exist last night as the town was wrapped in a strange atmosphere.

This "outer wall" was something Hajime instantly built. Using the magic-driven two-wheeler, he ran around the town's outer circumference and transmuted the

"outer wall" without leveling the land. First of all, the wall's height was only four meters tall because it was the range limit of Hajime's transmutation, it was not a really tall one. If it was a big-sized demonic beast, it would easily be able to climb over the wall. Tentatively, there's no problem because it made the people feel better in such an emergency. To begin with, Hajime wouldn't depend on such a wall.

The thing about the approaching army of tens of thousands of demonic beasts was already known to the townspeople. Considering the demonic beasts' movement speed, the vanguard would arrive right before evening. Naturally, the townspeople panicked. People

began to insult the town leaders including the mayor; others cried and collapsed on where they were, people closely embraced the person next to them, some scrambled to escape even among companions, and there were those who started to blame each other. Tomorrow, this town would be destroyed and they knew they'd lose their lives if they stayed here, so they didn't have the luxury to remain calm. The way they were acting couldn't be helped.

But there was someone who made them regain their composure. It was Aiko. Finally arriving at the town, the guard Knights received the briefing and they shouted "Goddess of Good Harvest." With her dignified appearance showing she didn't fear anything, coupled

with her originally high popularity made the people regain their composure for now. Hatayama Aiko, in a certain way, was more hero-like than a hero.

The people who regained their composure divided into two groups. Those who wouldn't throw away their hometown and would share the same fate as this town; the stay-behind group. The other one was as planned in the beginning, escaping to safety until rescue came; the shelter group. Even among the stay-behind group, a lot of women and children were put into the shelter. They believed Aiko's words that the demonic beasts would be repulsed, and they wondered if they could help somehow and the stay-behind men decided to help while the

wives and children would stay inside the shelter in case of an emergency. Although it passed midnight, the appearance of people embracing each others for separation in tears could be seen everywhere.

The shelter group went out of the town while carrying their luggages before dawn. The sun had raised high now, the people were divided between those who prepared for the battle and those who took a nap. Most of the stay-behind group believed in the "Goddess of Good Harvest"'s party, even so, we will protect our town ourselves!, we'll do what we can!, they were filled with such strong spirits.

Even if the people had decreased,

there was more liveliness than usual so Hajime sat on the instant rampart behind the town, it was unknown where he was looking as he looked at the distance. Naturally, by his sides were Yue and Shia. They sat beside Hajime, they thought of something, then the two quietly drew closer to him.

Them, Aiko, the students, Tio, Will, David, and several guard Knights arrived there. Even though he noticed Aiko and the others approaching, he didn't turn around and made David and the Knights frown, but Aiko called on him earlier than them.

"Nagumo-kun, how are your preparations? Did you need something else?"

"No, there's no problem, sensei."

Of course Hajime simply answered so without turning around. Unable to endure his attitude, David snapped on him.

"Oi, you. What's with your attitude towards Aiko... towards your honored teacher. Normally, I wouldn't overlook the details about the artifact you carry and the details about your method of repulsing the army of demonic beasts, but I didn't do that because Aiko had asked me earnestly, you know? At least..."

"David-san. Can you keep quiet for now?"

"Uh... affirmative..."

However, when Aiko told him to "shut up" he dejectedly shut his mouth. His appearance was just like a dog. Even though he wasn't a demi-human, one could see dog-ears and a tail. Now, those things seemed to hang down dejectedly because the owner was angry.

"Nagumo-kun. About the black-robed man..."

Apparently, that's the subject. Anguish oozed out from Aiko's words.

"Are you going to confirm his identity? Even if I find him, you're telling me to not kill him, right?"

"... Yes. It's necessary to confirm his identity. That's... if it's an

unreasonable thing for Nagumo-kun..."

"For the time being, I'll just bring him here."

"Eh?"

"I'll bring the black robe to sensei. Sensei is thinking as a teacher... so I'll do just that."

"Nagumo-kun... thank you very much."

Aiko was a little surprised because of the unexpected cooperation from Hajime. Hajime didn't even turn around even now, and thinking Hajime had a lot to think about, she decided to receive his goodwill. She muttered I am powerless as she

sighed secretly, then Aiko said her gratitude with a bitter smile.

It looked like Aiko's talk was over, and this time Tio moved forward and called Hajime.

"Fumu, I wonder if it's okay. This one mas-... gohonh! matter to talk... is a request, will you hear it?"

"? ... Tio huh"

"Th-Thou, don't tell me that this one's existence was forgotten... haa haa, there's also something like this..."

Because it was an unfamiliar voice, Hajime inadvertently looked over his shoulder, and there was black clothes with golden embroidery

which resembled a kimono and splendidly slipped down, white and smooth shoulders together with an enchanting valley, followed by the beautiful leg which peeped from the cut from the knee; a black-haired, golden-eyed beautiful woman. For a moment, his eyes seemed dubious and he remembered with "Aa, now that you mention" then called her name. Obviously, Tio whose existence was forgotten was far from getting angry, she was blushing and her breathing became rough. Her "something like this" was unknown, but it'd be better to not asked her about it.

"Nnh, nnh! That's, after this battle end and thou sent Will back, art thou going to continue to travel?"

"Aa, that's so."

"Fumu, this one's request is that... this one want to accompany thou..."

"I refuse."

"... Haa haa. I-Immediate answer just as expected. As expected of mas-...kohonh! Of course it's not for free! I'll call thou "Master" from now own, and dedicated all of this one to thee! Body and mind, all of them! How is it?"

"Just return, rather just return into the ground."

While spreading her arms, Tio declared to become Hajime slave with an expression of ecstasy, and

Hajime, who looked at her as if looking at a filth, immediately casted her away. Tio's body shook again. Her cheek became rose-colored. No matter who saw her, they'd thought of her as a pervert. Even the surrounding people were taken aback. Especially Yue who had strong yearning and respect towards Ryuujin tribe, her noh mask-like expression crumbled with all of her feelings.

"That's... cruel... Master was the one who turned this one's body into this... this one want thou to take the responsibility!"

Everyone became "Eh!?" as they looked at Hajime. As expected, he couldn't just leave that ridiculous and false accusation alone, Hajime

immediately looked at Tio's direction and he glared at her with veins popped. His glare asked what she meant by that.

"Au, to be seen as filth by those eyes again... haa haa... gulp... that's, look, isn't this one strong?"

Her body shuddered again because of Hajime's glare, then Tio began to explain her thought process that reached extraordinary conception to declared herself as Hajime's slave.

"Even in my hometown, this one only have one, two fights, and this one's particular endurance surpassed them. That's why, to be held down by other and even to felt pain-like pain never happened until

now and only until now."

Because the guard Knights nearby didn't know Tio came from Ryuujin tribe, Tio's words trickle down with some omission.

"That's why, when this one fought Master, it's the first time this one was knocked down, being held down, and tasted the pain and defeat for the first time. That's right, that fist which resonated with this body's core! The impacts that always aimed at unpleasant points! The pain that could felt throughout this one's body... haa haa"

Although Tio said that herself, the Knights who didn't know she was from Ryuujin race turned their gaze towards Hajime as if they looked at

a criminal. If ones heard it objectively, it was a completely like a woman assaulting case. "How could you assaulted such beautiful woman!," was the noise raised by the Knights. They didn't plainly blamed him because they felt pity on the victim; Tio. Rather, the Knights with strong sense of justice were perplexed because she look so happy.

"... In other words, Hajime opened a new door for you?"

"That's it! This one's body is already useless without Master!"

"... Gross"

Yue's expression was distorted as if she saw something unpleasant, her

tone no longer carried respect when Tio said her agreement. Spontantly, Hajime revealed his feeling. He was completely taken aback.

"Furthermore..."

Tio's perverted look suddenly changed as she began fidgeting while she held her hip with her hands in embarrassment.

"... This one's first time was stolen already."

With those words, everyone's faces showed their surprise as they looked at Hajime. Hajime said "There's no such thing," as he shook his neck while his cheeks were convulsing.

"This one had decided to only admit stronger man than this one as companion... but, there's no such person in this one's hometown... To be defeated, and to be held down like that... was the first time... to suddenly used this one's ass... Moreover, such intensity... that's why thou art this one's Master. This one want thou to take responsibility."

Tio's eyes were moistened as she looked at Hajime while holding her butt. The Knights' eyes said, "This guy just a criminal after all!," and continued with "To suddenly attacked the ass-," as they talked and floated shuddering expressions. Even Aiko and the others who knew the truth glared at Hajime with blaming eyes. Even Yue and Shia's

expressions by his side said, "That's a little-," as they averted their gazes. Even before the approaching of the army, Hajime was dragged into a situation where he was surrounded by enemies on all sides.

"Y-You, didn't you have things to do? That's why you went out from your hometown."

Because Yue and the others averted their gazes, Hajime replied desperately about "Ryuujin race's investigation."

"Umu. There's no problem. It absolutely will become more efficient if this one is beside Master. It's just like hitting two birds with one stone... look, aren't there various things happened in travel?

It's okay to let out the frustration on this one, okay? It's also okay to do it stronger. Isn't that a good thing for Master?"

"There's only demerit with a pervert by my side."

Tio clung to him, but Hajime just cast her away. It followed by the guard Knights' resentment, female students who saw Hajime as a maggot, male students who felt a complex about women from different world as they looked at Hajime with envy, Aiko who started to preach about illicit sexual relationship, and Will who somehow looked at Hajime with eyes of respect. Inside such chaotic situation, the army kept approaching them, and when

Hajime started to became tired of it, they finally came.

" ! ... They've arrive huh."

Hajime suddenly turned his gaze towards the mountain range area in the north. He displayed his narrowed eyes as he looked at the distance. Even though they weren't in location that could be seen by naked eyes, Hajime could clearly saw it from the image from Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes which displayed on his "Magic Eye Crystal."

There was a crowd of demonic beasts who completely wrapped the ground. Beside human-type demonic beasts like Brutal, there were three-four meter big and black

wolf-like demonic beasts, and there were also lizard-like demonic beasts with six legs, phyton-like demonic beasts with needles protruded from their backs, mantis-like demonic beasts with four scythes, huge spider-like demonic beasts with numerous tentacles grown all over their bodies, and there were pure white, two headed snakes. It truly a rich variation of demonic beasts and their march made the ground trembled as cloud of dust was scattered by their tremendous force. Their number seemed to have increased further since the time he confirmed it at the mountain. It was a large army of around 50,000-60,000.

In addition, there were also flying-type demonic beasts above the large

crowd. They could be compared to the Pteranodon. One of the tens of pteranodon-fakers was especially big, and a person shadow could slightly be seen on it. It was probably the black robed man. Although Aiko's manner showed she didn't want to believe it, it was Shimizu Yukitoshi 8 or 9 out of ten cases.

"... Hajime."
"Hajime-san."

Yue and Shia noticed something approached them from the change in Hajime's atmosphere. They called out to Hajime. Hajime turned his gaze towards the two and he nodded once, following that he turned his glance towards Aiko and the others whose faces filled with

tension behind him.

"They've come. Although it's considerably earlier than the schedule, it'll be 30 minutes until their arrival. The number are more than 50,000. They are mix of more than two kind of demonic beasts."

Hearing the number of demonic beasts had increased further, Aiko and the others turned paler. Towards Aiko and the others who looked uneasy, Hajime jumped above the wall and he displayed a fearless smile over his shoulder.

"Don't make that face, sensei. There'll be no problem because there's only addition of several tens of thousand. Just as planned, those who can fight should stand by the

"wall side" in case of emergency. Well, there'll be no turn for them though."

Without any fighting mood, Hajime told them to leave it to him, and Aiko narrowed her eyes as they slightly sparkling.

"I understand... though I don't know what I can do just by standing here just as you've said... somehow please be safe..."

As Aiko said that, the guard Knights said, "I wonder if it's okay to leave it to Hajime" and "Even though it's too late, we should go to the shelter," as they ran while carrying the information towards the town. Even the students looked at Hajime with complexed eyes once, then ran

after Aiko. Beside Hajime and his party, the remaining were only Will and Tio.

Will was talking about something to Tio, then he ran after Aiko and the others after he bowed to Hajime. Tio answered Hajime's questioning face with a wry smile.

"Because this one will use all of this one's power to overcome this incident, then at the very least this ones wanted Will-boy to forgive this one about the adventurers, that kind of talk... that's why this one will help thee. What, even if this one's magic power isn't recovered enough for Dragon Form, this one's flame and wind are quite the real deal, kay?"

Ryuujin race was called odd existence by the church, and although they could be considered as demi-human race, they could directly manipulated magic power just like demonic beasts. Therefore, even though she wasn't an all attribute, chantless, no magic circle genius like Yue, there were attributes she excelled at, and she seemed to be capable to do it chantless just like Yue.

Tio self-claimed that as she vehemently stuck out her chest to deliberately emphasized it, but Hajime just silently throw a ring made of magic-crystallization stone. Although Tio showed a questioning look, she opened her eyes wide when she understood it was a magic power tank made of God Crystal,

then she looked at Hajime with moistened eyes and speak with a shaking voice.

"Master... to propose right before a fight... this one, of course, this one's answer is..."

"As if. I am only lending it to you because you have the duty as the battery, no more, no less. Rather, did you just tried to be the fool like a certain someone just now?"

"... I see, that black history."

Yue dropped her shoulders with unpleasant expression because her thought pattern was somewhat similar to this pervert. Hajime's objection was completely ignored as Tio put the ring on her finger and

gazed at it with a grin while she was also being ignored by him, and finally the large group of demonic beasts could be seen by naked eyes. People with bows and magic arrays in their hands gathered on the "outer wall." The ground began to tremor, and demonic beasts' roars could be heard together with dust storm in the distance. Some people started to pray to the god and some people wore expressions as if they'd be dead at any time.

Having seen that, Hajime came forward. Using transmutation, he created the speech stand by piling up the ground. He didn't thought of easing people's anxiety because it'd simply turned into panic if friendly fire happened.

Something suddenly climbed on the foundation outside the wall, and the people who thought it was one of the approaching demonic beasts were glaring at it, but they were bewildered because where their gazes gathered was a white-haired, eye-patched boy.

After he confirmed everyone's gazes were turned to him, Hajime inhaled then speak with a voice that could reached the heaven.

"Listen! O brave people of Ul town! Our victory is nothing but confirmed!"

Wondering what was suddenly said, the townspeople looked at each other. Hajime looked at their confusion with narrowed eyes and

continued his words.

"If you ask for the reason, it is because the Goddess has taken side with us! That's right, it's the "Goddess of Good Harvest" everyone know; Aiko-sama!"

Hearing those words, everyone began to raised noises with, Aiko-sama? Goddess of Good Harvest?. Aiko whose accompanied by the guard Knights behind and had been helped guiding the people became stupefied.

"As long as Aiko-sama is beside us, we are unbeatable! Aiko-sama is the living god send by the heaven as an ally to humanity, and brought to us "Good Harvest" and "Victory"! I am Aiko-sama's sword and also her

shield, I am here to answer her desire to protect everyone! Look! This is my power which guided by Aiko-sama!"

As he said that, Hajime pull out Schlagen from the void and anchors from its barrel pierced the ground to fixed its position. Following that, he crouched and the townspeople observed him as he aligned his sight towards the vanguard of demonic beasts, the pteranodon-fakers... and he pulled the trigger.

A bright red spark released from Schlagen and accompanied with killing intent, a blinding light ran through the sky in an instant. It crushed one of the pteranodon-fakes which was several kilometers away, and several others on the

surrounding descended into the ground because their wings were pulverized by the after-effect. As is, Hajime continued to fired for the second and third times, and the demonic beasts in the sky were exterminated. Then, he purposely altered his aim and the rather huge pteranodon-fake started to fall as it was confused by what happened, moreover the black robed man who rode on it was blown by the after-effect. The black robe blown into the air and he tried to resist the fall.

He didn't have the time to bring the black robe to Aiko until all of the demonic beasts were dealt with, so he choose to defeat the fastest ones to escape for now. Although Aiko would be angry if she heard he shot him down, he didn't care at the

least if that person was hurt after all. At least Aiko might not noticed it because he shot it down while they were still far away.

Hajime finished exterminating the demonic beasts in the sky and he calmly turned around. There were the appearances of the townspeople who became dumbfounded and slack-jawed.

"All hail Aiko-sama!"

Hajime raised words of praise for Aiko as his last duty. Then, in the next moment...

""""""All hail Aiko-sama! Long live Aiko-sama! Cheers for Aiko-sama! All hail Aiko-sama!""""""
""""""All hail Goddess! Long live

Goddess! Cheers for Goddess! All hail Goddess!"""""""

Inside Ul town, it was no longer just her nickname, a true goddess was bornt. Apparently, their anxiety had blown away as everyone in the town raise shouts of praise as their shining eyes looked towards Aiko, the goddess; their hope. In the distance, Aiko's face turned crimson as she trembled. Her eyes immediately turned towards Hajime and her small mouth moved as it said, "What.Do.You.Mean.By.This!".

Hajime turned towards the large crowd of demonic beasts again. Hajime pushed such façade to Aiko because he had his own reason. First, Hajime's activity would surely make the Church and

the Kingdom move in the future, and because Aiko would confronted them if they tried to harm Hajime, it'd be better for her words as "Goddess of Good Harvest" carried power at that time. If they could overcome the town's emergency with Aiko-sama(...)'s power, then the townspeople would started their own rumour and the name "Goddess of Good Harvest" would surely grabbed people's hearts further. At that time, she wasn't only a useful talent for the kingdom but also the goddess that people supported, so the Church and the Kingdom couldn't easily put their hands on her as her words carried more power.

The second reason was simply because the townspeople would

only become frightened and hostile if they were shown a big power. That's why even if they showed their power, the townspeople's wonder and fear would be relieved when they remembered it came from the goddess who supported them, and the hostility could be changed to goodwill. Even if they were chased by the Church, there'd be people who cooperated with them... and that's a good thing.

The third reason was simply to declare that he'd took the full brunt of everything aimed towards "Nagumo Hajime's teacher."

His number one reason was so that the townspeople would not panicked and did something wrong, and he immediately thought to do

that. Afterwards Aiko would told him various things, but there were also merits for Aiko and she should overlook it because it was the result of her decision... it'd be okay to just escape once everything's over.

With townspeople's shouts that they wouldn't be defeated by demonic beasts because of Aiko on his back, along with Aiko's piercing glance, and the guard Knights floated smiles as they muttered "Just what, that guys understood well what we meant" and looked at him, Hajime took out two Metherai's ammunition belt from "Treasure Box" and put them on his shoulders as he advanced ahead.

On her right was Yue as always, on his left was Shia with Orkan on her

shoulder which Hajime loaned to her, and beside him was also Tio who absent-mindedly staring at the ring of magic crystallization stone. On the horizon, the pteranodon-fakers who fell to the ground as if they weren't related to all of this and demonic beasts who marched single-mindedly filled their view.

Hajime looked at Yue. Yue returned Hajime's gaze and silently nodded. Hajime looked at Shia. Shia with her rabbit ears stood straight nodded full of confidence. Tio on his side... he just put her aside.

Hajime returned his gaze towards the large crowd and floated a smile, and he mutter without any eagerness.

"Then, let's do it."

Chapter 62: Ul Town's Trampling Drama

* * *

(What's with this... what the heck THIS IS!!)

The large crowd of tens of thousand demonic beasts came to attack Ul town from the rear side. The instantly built moat, and the boy, Shimizu Yukitoshi, who desperately shrunk his trembling body as he hysterically invoked barrier, could only flapped his mouth as he couldn't believed the disastrous scene in front of him. An

unbelievable spectacle, and the reality he didn't want to believe, he repeatedly cursed with words that wouldn't come out.

That's right, the one behind the large crowd of demonic beasts was unmistakably Aiko's missing student, Shimizu Yukitoshi. By the contract he exchanged with a certain man, he planned to frame Aiko and the others for Ul's annihilation. However, the townspeople whom he thought would be easily twisted and crushed were still unharmed by the completely unforeseen and threatening ambush. Rather, the current progress brought forth was just like a painting of hell for Shimizu's side.

DOuRURURURURURURURURU!!!
DOuRURURURURURURURURU!!!

As such peculiar sounds resounded in the battlefield, numerous flashes filled with enough killing intent speeded along the sky. The flashes reached their target without giving any time to wink. No matter how strong the several species of demonic beasts who roared and made the earth rumbled were, they were changed into lump of meat in a moment without any chance to resist. The 12,000 death per minute became a merciless "wall" as they approached and they pierced their targets without such lukewarm words of "one bullet one body" as they went through several tens of more demonic beasts in the back.

The pierced demonic beasts, ignoring the law of inertia, were burst and collapsed on the spots in general. The demonic beasts immediately spreaded out to left and right to escape the trail of deaths. But the shooter, Hajime, naturally wouldn't let them escape as he fired the second round from Metherai just like a folding fan. The "barrage" released and it approached all of the demonic beasts just like a rampart. In the blink of time, the mountain of corpses and river of blood were built.

In addition, on Hajime's left side was Shia with Orkan on her shoulders and shouted, "Fly however you want~," as she pulled the trigger. Pashu rang out in

succession as the rocket launcher fired.

On the contrary of those stupid sounds, the warheads passed into the middle of demonic beasts as they leave trails of sparks and caused huge explosions which blown the demonic beasts within ten meters. The demonic beasts' bodies near the ground zero were turned into pieces while the intense shock waves damaged the bones and internal organs of the ones farther. Furthermore, the demonic beasts that were incapable of even standing up were treaded and crushed to death.

Even though she exhausted all of the ammo, Shia reloaded it with the piles of warheads on her side from

Hajime and fired them successively. The fired rockets exploded overhead the demonic beast just like grenades, and numerous brightly burning flames were scattered below. Just like incendiary grenade, the liquid tars which kept burning at 3,000 oC were extracted from Flame Crystal and poured down just like a great rain towards the demonic beasts whose bodies were burnt to ashes. They screamed and struggled as the flame which carried scorching destruction spreaded and swallowed the surroundings demonic beasts. Comparing the number of demonic beasts that exploded and the ones turned to ashes, in the area Shia was in charge of... were two against one.

Tio was positioned at Shia's right side. Her outstretched hands were releasing black aurora which scorched the surrounding air since a while ago. It was the Breath from her dragon form. Apparently, she was capable of shooting it even in human form. The black flame which was capable to press on Hajime's full power, defense flew and instantly penetrated the large crowds in the rear into annihilation. As is, Tio moved her arms horizontally and the black bombardment moved according to her arms and annihilated everything.

After the bombardment was stopped, nothing remained except the gouged ground. In exchange, it should be considerably exhausting.

Tio's shoulders were dropped as her body trembled. However, she immediately straightened her posture after she kissed the ring in her finger. She was taking out magic power's stock inside the ring of magic crystallization she stone received from Hajime. Because of Breath attack, the vanguard demonic beasts around the area she was in charge of were annihilated, and Tio who could take it easy used magic with comparatively smaller consumption rate.

"Wind which blowing wildly, the torrent which burn in crimson, "Worldly Flame Tempest"."

For the sake of suppressing magic power consumption rate, she chanted and heightened her

concentration. Following that, flame tornado magic was released. Its scale was the same as F4 class tornado on earth. The swirling flame of ten meters in diameter advanced towards the group of demonic beasts and the surrounding demonic beasts were blown up. The demonic beasts thrown up into the air didn't have any way to struggle and they jumped into the flame as is. Following that, what was thrown out from the crimson tornado were ashes scattered like gray snow. The tornado which turned everything into ashes was trampling the battlefield without reserve.

Yue's annihilation power on Hajime's right side surpassed them. Even though Hajime and the others

started the attack, Yue stood still and had her eyes closed. The demonic beasts, who realized the attack from the right side was thinner, gathered there to escape the storm of destruction and invaded from the right-wing. The marching demonic beasts were crowding and came charging. At the moment, their distance was about 500 meters. Yue opened her eyes and slowly raised her right hand, and with two whispered words, she recited the name of the powerful magic as if declaring it to the world.

""Threat Destroyer""

It was the trigger to invoke the Age of God's magic. It was the magic granted by Miledi Raisen which interfere with one law of the world,

"gravity movement." For the vampire princess who held the natural talent for magic, she needed a "long time" to control her magic power and to fix the image because it was a difficult magic she couldn't invoke immediately, yet.

Along with Yue's chant, the same swirling, dark orb just like the one when they fought the black dragon appeared above the approaching demonic beasts. However, there were differences as the orb shape was changed. The orb became thinner and thinner until its length reached 500 meters squarely above the demonic beasts. Following that, the dark ceiling which blocked the sunlight immediately fell before the demonic beasts.

In the next moment, it could be said "the demonic beasts were annihilated from the world." In truth, the Ul's townspeople behind the wall could only dumbfoundedly watch what Hajime and his party did as a trampling play; there's no other way to look at it.

The truth they seen made it looked like a simple thing. The dark ceiling fell into the the group of demonic beast, the demonic beast sunk into the ground as is, and a 10 meter crater with length of 500 meters was created. The demonic beasts that crowding and charging didn't have the time to understand what happened as all of their bodies were crushed and became stains at the bottom of the ground. In an aspect, it became just like the dump for

demonic beasts' corpses. With only an attack from Yue, nearly 2,000 demonic beasts were killed in an instant, they were unfortunate as the demonic beasts' bodies were turned into pieces with their entrails scattered with this above the borderline technique.

The following demonic beasts fell one by one into the huge hole where the ground suddenly disappeared. Unable to null their charging momentum, they were pushed from the back. In the blink of time, several thousands of demonic beasts fell into the huge hole, then Yue once again interfere with gravity using magic power which taken out from magic crystallization stone. Demonic beasts' corpses were piled on top of

demonic beasts' corpses.

The blowing wind carried the smell of the trampled demonic beasts' blood towards the town. Such strong smell made the townspeople one by one unable to suppressed their nausea, even so the townspeople raised an uproar because of the unreal "overwhelming power" and "trampling play." WAaAAA——, shout of joy raised all over the town.

The town leaders and the guard Knights remained dumbfounded as they saw Hajime and his party's power for the first time. The students who once again witnessed that power could strongly feel the "differences" between them as they

showed expressions with mixed feelings. Originally, they were going protect the people from such demonic beasts, at leasts they first objected to defending from the same location as the townspeople where they could only see the back of a classmate that was looked down as an "incompetent." That's why their mind became complexed.

Aiko was only praying single-mindedly. For the safety of Hajime and his party. At the same time, her expression was distorted because the things about her had became too late to repair. With such gruesome battlefield in front of her, the contradiction with her sweetness strike on people's hearts.

Before long, the number of demonic

beasts were remarkably decreased and the northern ground which was hidden by the large crowd could be seen, and Tio finally fell. Having exhausted the magic power from magic crystallization stone, she couldn't move because of magic power exhaustion.

"Muu, this one will stop here... already, no fireball can be made... sorry."

While she collapsed in prostration, only her face looked at Hajime which filled with apologizes and Tio's complexion had passed from blue as it turned white. Literally, the consumption of magic power she did could brought about her death.

"... It's enough. Looks like you aren't

just a pervert. Leave the rest to me and sleep as is."

"... For Master to be gentle... though I thought I'd be insulted... No, about the whipping after this over... can I expect it?"

"Just die as is."

With her face looked like the dead whose blood was extracted, Tio's body began to trembling by Hajime's words. Her expression was one of a satisfaction. Hajime looked at her as if he saw something disgusting and clicked his tongue, then he returned his gaze towards the group of demonic beasts.

Now, their number with scale of 10,000 had been reduced by 8,000

to 9,000. If remembering the large crowd in the beginning, the damages could be stated as a total annihilation. However, the demonic beasts were still made reckless charges. To be accurate, it seemed some of the demonic beasts were giving them commands. The ordinary demonic beasts completely obeyed them, following the commands from the leader of various species, and they charging in perplexion. Hajime was able to noticed that because their number had fallen.

Assuming Shimizu Yukitoshi as the culprit behind this incident, even if he carried some cheats, in truth, Hajime felt suspicious about it as he thought if he really could brainwashed such large crowd just

like Tio. But, not all of the tens of thousands demonic beasts were brainwashed, by brainwashing the leaders of various species, he made the subordinates followed those leaders. It was quite efficient. However, there was still the doubt on how he gathered such number in a short time...

For now, he'd put that doubt aside. Because the leaders movements were monotonous and slow, even though there were some flexibilities along with the composition of demonic beasts who obeyed the repeated reckless commands, it'd be better for him to quickly kill those leaders. If he did that, the demonic beasts that faithful to their instinct would run away into the northern mountain because the difference of

force from Hajime and his party was already carved into their body.

Hajime stared at the extermination weapon, Metherai, in his hands. Two smokes were raised and it seemed the cooling wouldn't make it in time. If he continued to attack more than this, it'd fell apart somewhere. Of course there was the possibility to restore it, but he couldn't do it instantly because it was a delicate objects. It was necessary to took some time to work precisely on it. That's why, because it'd be a hassle, he switched to more appropriate method of attack.

"Yue, your remaining magic power?"

"... Nn, only two of magic crystallization stones left... the consumption rate of that gravity magic was more than expected. Training is needed."

"No no, didn't you just kill more than 20.000 alone? That's enough. I'll just pinpoint attack the leftover. Please cover me."

"Nnh."

Even though Hajime's words were few, Yue immediately nodded in acknowledgement and carried it out. They were in harmony. Satisfied by that, Hajime talked to Shia.

"Shia, did you understand the difference in the demonic beasts?"

"Yes, The manipulated demonic beasts just like Tio at that time and the weak-kneed demonic beasts, right?"

"Weak-kneed... yup, well, that's right. Probably, those demonic beasts that look like Tio's are the leaders of the groups. The others will run away if they are killed."

"I see, because I don't have any ammo left, it's direct killing!"

"... Ah, aa. What can I say, you've become sturdier..."

"Of course. It is for the sake of being by the side of you two."

Towards the smiling Shia, Hajime

returned a wry smile which somehow feel like a gentle smile. However, he tightened his expression as he put Metherai inside the "Treasure Box" and took out Donner-Schlag. At the same time, Shia also put Orkan away and her hand reached Doryukken on her back.

The leaders of demonic beasts numbered around 100. Perhaps, because of the suicide assault, they began to lost their leadership on the subordinate demonic beasts as majority of them fall back.

The attacks from Metherai and Orkan, followed by Tio's magic might made them thought they had lost their chance, and the demonic beasts began to march back.

To cover Hajime and Shia' attack, Yue invoked her magic.

""Thunder Dragon""

Immediately a dragon of thunder that created violent sparks and raised roars of thunderbolts appeared from the heaven which shrouded by dark cloud, and it infringed the frontline from the right to the left. The golden dragon opened its huge mouth, and seeing the group of demonic beasts annihilated as they voluntarily jumped, the following demonic beasts once again flinching. At that chance, Hajime and Shia charge at the crowd at once.

DOPANh! DOPANh! DOPANh!

DOPANh! DOPANh! DOPANh!

Hajime used "Ground Shrinker" as he dashed on the ground and successively fired Donner-Schlag. His eyes grasped the appearances from the small gap on the crowd, he fired the flashes of death and they reached the targets through the small gap as they hit right at the vital points without mercy.

Without even glancing at the demonic beasts in the frontline, somehow only the leaders in the back were mysteriously burst open one after another which made the surrounding demonic beasts halted. Then, a shadow suddenly appeared above one of the demonic beasts. Immediately, the demonic beasts looked up at the sky and there was

a girl with fluttering rabbit ears and carrying a gigantic warhammer literally fell from the sky and jumped into the scene.

That girl was Shia, she stepped on the demonic beasts' heads and hopping just like a rabbit above the crowd. The last demonic beast's head she stepped on was crushed as she jumped grandly and she flew at once into the sky using Gravity magic to lightened her weight.

Following that, she turned around as she passed the zenith, she increased her weight several times at once and fall with tremendous power. Her targeted point was of course the location where several leaders were stiffened. Her free fall speed was accelerated further as

the reaction from the outburst when she pulled Doryukken's trigger, and she used body strengthening to the limit to put the highest power into her attack. Then, the hammer that could be called the destruction incarnated fall down without even losing its momentum.

"RYAaAAAA!!!"

DOoGAaAAAA!!!

The attack which accompanied with lovely shout was just like a meteorite. The Brutal-type leader who received the direct hit was crushed to death as its head immediately reached the ground while flesh and blood were scattered by the violent impact. The

flesh and blood slipped into the ground and stones which blown by the impact and returned to the ground as fertilizer. Following that, the same fate visited the crowding demonic beasts in the surroundings. Doryukken's overwhelming impact made the ground and stones flew just like bullets and scattered the fleshes which also returned into the ground just like before.

Shia was in the bottom of the crater she made herself and she used the reaction from the outburst to pull Doryukken which buried on the ground and at the same time she used the high-speed movement to move towards the demonic beasts and once again attacked each group's leader.

As expected, she didn't have the heart to just naively let the demonic beasts that did whatever they please away, and Shia crushed the surrounding meat wall to death. Shia used Doryukken's designed gimmick to further extended the handle by more than one meter and used the outburst to do high-speed revolution just like a spinning top. Following that, Doryukken which carried enough centrifugal force blown away the approaching mixed wall of meat.

Countless Brutals fluttered as they were blown away radially. The girl with delicate appearance easily blown away the many times bigger demonic beasts as if they were pingpong ball. The spectacle was

just like a joke. Shia restored her body pose from the flow of gyration and she became depressed when she saw the targeted leaders were crushed from the gap of the blown away Brutals.

Then, in that moment, her rabbit ears caught a sound of something new approaching in high speed from the right rear. Without panicking, Shia timingly rotated her body and used Doryukken to intercept the ambush. But, the newcomers, demonic beasts with black-fur, four ruby-like eyes, and looked like wolves, were already expecting that as they immediately decelerated and splendidly avoid Shia's attack.

If they were normal demonic beasts,

in theory they'd continued the attack and became corpses by the swung weapon. Actually, Shia also had thought of that as she concentrated her body strengthening on her legs, and she'd won by immediately jumping overhead the raid.

However, Shia's expectation was betrayed. Somehow the four-eyed wolves weren't jumped at Shia but Doryukken with their strong jaws as they used all of their might to pushed the ground to seal it. Of course such demonic beasts couldn't beat Shia's body strengthening. But, because she was surprised by the unexpected, her movement was sealed for a moment.

Thus the black, four-eyed wolves had enough time. The same kind of demonic beast was approaching as it opened its mouth filled with sharp fangs from Shia's back with a perfect timing. Shia opened her eyes wide and immediately released the body strengthening which concentrated on her legs towards her whole body. That because she was preparing to received the attacks.

At the moment those sharp fangs almost drenched by Shia's blood, something interrupted between Shia and the four-eyed wolf. With length of 60 cm and width of 40 cm, it was a metallic cross which middle part was just like a round shield. That cross prevented the demonic beast's mouth from biting

Shia.

Gari gari sound resounded and the demonic beast desperately tried to crunch the foreign object that jumped out all of a sudden, but the cross that emitted weak red light wasn't daunted at all. In the next moment, the demonic beast's lower jaw was blown off accompanied with roaring sound.

"GUuRUaAA!!!"

The cross soundlessly moved overhead the screaming and writhing demonic beast and a bullet pulverized the demonic beast's head accompanied with another roaring sound. In addition,

ZUDONh!!

Hearing the firing sound, Shia lightened her grip on Doryukken. Shia looked back at the four-eyed wolves who temporary closed off her path and their abdomens and heads were also shot through as they crumbled by another two crosses which floating mid-air.

""Shia, don't relax your guard. Among the demonic beasts, there were some whose movement are obviously different. There's not only brainwashed ones and the subordinates of demonic beasts. Take three of the Cross Bits with you. Annihilate the 27 on the right. The frontline will hold for five minutes for Yue.""

Shia finally caught up that she had

escaped from the pinch and he received the "Telepathy" from Hajime. Hah, Shia who regained her senses was straightening herself and answered through the telepathy stone on her choker (Shia never thought of it as a collar).

"Roger! Also, I am saved. Thank you very much!"

"Ou, be careful."

"... Fufu, recently, Hajime-san's attitude becoming more and more softened. It is just one step away from it to become an accomplished fact!"

Having confirmed the communication was cut, Shia muttered that to herself as she

smiled because the floating "Cross Bits" in the surroundings were as if they were protecting her. Following that, she psyched up and readied Doryukken, then she set out to annihilate the cautious leader which had different fur color from the demonic beasts from a while ago.

"Fuu, just as usual, she always got into some trouble, this girl..."

Muttering that, Hajime exterminated the demonic beasts with overwhelming force. There were four cross floating around Hajime.

"Cross Bit" was how Hajime called the floating crosses, they moved by the same principle as the

Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes and their type specialized in attacking. Inside were loaded with gun and rifle bullet, they were operated using the bracelet where seven induction stones were installed. Moreover, the surface was covered with mineral which endowed with "Vajra" using Creation magic, so they could become strong shields as they reacted on the magic power from induction stone.

Hajime, who used Gun=Kata as he pleased while manipulating the Cross Bits at the same time, unfolded a storm of attacks without any room of escape. Already, 40 of the demonic beasts' leaders were killed and there were demonic beasts who began to escape from

the full-powered "Pressure."

Then, a human's shadow who screaming something towards the escaping demonic beasts in the distance was seen by Hajime at the edge of his view. Because it only put out its head from the ground, for a moment he thought it was someone's severed head, but Hajime used "Farsight" and he certainly saw it move. That head was covered with black robe.

The black robed man, Shimizu was throwing a tantrum just like a child as he shouted at the escaping demonic beasts, then he began to recite something as he held up the artifact staff received in Imperial Palace. Of course, because there was no obligation to wait for the

chant completion, Hajime fired Donner in his spare time and the staff was blown off in the middle. As the after effect, Shimizu was knocked and collapsed into the hole on the ground.

Thus although he didn't know what Shimizu was trying to do, the black, four-eyed, wolf-type demonic beasts who were hidden inside the crowd and patiently waiting for the decisive gap around Hajime jumped at once. As expected, they had the potential of coordination ability that couldn't be compared to the surrounding demonic beasts. It made him remembered the two-tailed wolf from before.

Actually, Hajime feel they could be a good match if they fight against

the two-tailed wolf. Although they didn't have peculiar magic to manipulate thunder and simply had inferior offensive power compared to the two-tailed wolf, sometime, they evaded the location Hajime attacked as if they knew about it, so their peculiar magic must be something along "Prediction" system. Following that, their coordination would make them the same level as the two-tailed wolf... in other words, it wasn't strange for the demonic beasts to be in the so-called low layer of the Abyss.

Why such demonic beasts here?, though there was such a doubt, he undertaking attacks, so it was just unnecessary thought for now. Hajime temporarily averted his thought from eliminating the

leaders of the demonic beasts and concentrated on defeating the 12 black, four-eyed wolves.

Front, back, left, and right, furthermore there were black, four-eyed wolves who began to attack from above, so he rotated his body like a top and successively fired Donner-Schlag. They used "Prediction" to evaded from their spots, and Hajime also used "Prediction" to attack their next location. Even so, he was surprised that there were some that still capable to evade. Similar to the two-tailed wolf, they must have a method of communication like telepathy among their companions, and there might be some who looked over the battlefield.

Avoiding Hajime's shots, the four-eyed wolf leaped from the back because of the small gap when he reloaded mid-air, and one of the Cross Bits expanded just like flower petal and blown it away. Using that demonic beasts as stepping stone was another four-eyed wolf as it jumped, and the Cross Bit immediately became a shield to obstructed it, then he shoot out the Shotgun from the elbow of his artificial left arm.

Inside the rain of flesh and blood, two Cross Bits concentrated barrage at one corner towards the encircling four-eyed wolves. When the encirclement opened by force, he slipped through using "Ground Shrinker" and shot to death the four-eyed wolves from the back

which followed by Donner-Schlag further slaughtering another two because they had finished reloading.

Then, there was one that thrown away its body since the start and hurled its attacked body as it jumped towards Hajime. Hajime evaded by jumping sideway, shot the lower part of the demonic beast that came flying and blown off the four-eyed wolf that charging from its back. Taking a passive approach, Hajime immediately stood up and the four-eyed wolves opened their big mouths as if they had waited for this moment, then they tried to crunch Hajime with their fangs. It was a perfect timing. If seen from the side, it unmistakably could be seen that the four-eyed wolves'

mouths had settled on Hajime's body.

However, at that time Hajime's appearance started to sway and the four-eyed wolves' mouths only gachin!, let out such sounds as they bit the empty space. Unbeknownst to them, Hajime's body had advanced one step. Hajime shot through the abdomens of the four-eyed wolves he just passed through.

Furthermore, another four-eyed wolves leaped at Hajime, but it became the same as before, the place they attacked was wrong by a step. In each case, Hajime shot and blown them away as they passed each other.

The black, four-eyed wolves were as

if they mistaken their eyes measurement and the chain of event completely became like that. It was the skill derived from Hajime's "Sign Interception" called "+Phantom Step". The effect was at the time he intercepted his presence and he'd leave his presence in the spot before he intercepted it for a few seconds. Because the real body's presence was intercepted, it'd be mistaken that he was still on his former location. Of course, because he merely shifted his presence, it was comparatively easier to notice if ones carefully observed him. But, in a fight which few comma of seconds could decided between victory and defeat, it was difficult for them to not be puzzled. The validity increased if the enemies

were particularly sensitive towards presence.

Naturally, Hajime used "Light Speed" to control the Cross Bits, so no matter even if the black, four-eyed wolves were demonic beasts with Abyss-class power, they naturally weren't enemies for him. In the end, although the four-eyed wolves were probably Shimizu's trump card, they couldn't even grazed Hajime and annihilated in two minutes.

Hajime scattered the Cross Bits which killed the leaders with raging force. From the information the Cross Bits he put beside Shia in separated location, only several left before it ended in the other side. Even the demonic beasts that tried

to charge towards the town were completely disallowed to drew near by Yue's thunder dragon.

After about two minutes, Hajime confirmed that they succeeded in eliminating the brainwashed demonic beasts. Then, having confirmed that, suu— he greatly inhaled and roared which coupled with "Magic Power Emission."

"KAaAAAAAAAAAAA!!!"

The huge roar and the surge of magic power ran through the battlefield. The overwhelming pressure attacked and shocked the demonic beasts' minds and they feel huge instinctive fear. Following that, they noticed their groups' leaders were already non-existence.

After a moment of stiffening, they began to turn on their heels and desperately escaping towards the north while making a detour around Hajime.

The groups of demonic beasts which like a water current was as if parted by a rock on the river which was Hajime. Hajime confirmed his appearance with a sharp gaze, when he discovered Shimizu who seemed trying to escape using the last four-eyed wolf in the moment of confusion.

Hajime kneeled and firmly set Donner with both hands and successively pulled the trigger. The bullets ran through the air with miraculous time lag, the four-eyed wolf sneak a glance towards the

sign of turbulence felt by "Prediction" and avoid the first attack, but it collapsed as the second attack shot through its big thigh. The impact made Shimizu blown away. Because his body's specs were high, he immediately got up even though his body was struck hard. He rushed and shouted something towards the four-eyed wolf then he started to kick its head.

He probably shouted something about it should quickly stand up. He was obviously hysteric. After a while, maybe he was hinted by something to force the wolf to move, he began to chant as he put his hand on the black, four-eyed wolf's head.

Hajime saw that, fired the railgun without the need to discuss, and pierced where the black, four-eyed wolf was stopped. Shimizu who once again blown away because of the after effect was moving his limbs in panic, and this time he escaping by himself as he began to run towards the north just like the demonic beasts.

Hajime took out magic-driven two-wheeler, accelerated at once and caught up to Shimizu in the blink of the time. Shimizu looked back towards the KIiIII! sound behind him and he frantically moved his limbs to escape as he became stupefied by the bike which shouldn't be existed in this different world.

"What! What the hell! That's impossible! If it's true, the same hero as I- GUPEh!?"

The back of the head of Shimizu who frantically running while cursing was struck by Hajime's artificial arm with two-wheeler's momentum as is. Shimizu's face dived into the ground and slipped on the ground for several meters with killer whale-like posture before he stopped.

"Well then, what should I say to sensei? About this guy... and according to the situation, mine will..."

Hajime said that to himself as he tied up Shimizu using the wire from his artificial arm and return

towards the town as is. The appearance of Shimizu who was dragged by the two-wheeler as he was painted by the scattered blood and fleshes of demonic beasts while creating a dust storm on the ruined ground... could be correctly said as a defeated soldier.

Chapter 63: Undesired Result

* * *

For Shimizu Yukitoshi, to be summoned to a different world was the dream he yearned for. Because he knew that was impossible, every day he was dreaming by a reading book in his hand or web novels. In his dream, he saved a lot of worlds, though he didn't know if he went towards the Happy End with the heroines. Inside Shimizu's room, the walls couldn't be seen as they were buried by posters of beautiful girls, and inside the glass rack at one of the walls were his favorite

beautiful girl figures with improper poses lined up in such a cramped place. His bookshelf was filled with manga, light novels, thin books, and eroges, while the ones that couldn't be put there were all over the room as they made towers.

That's right, Shimizu Yukitoshi was a genuine otaku. However, there's no one among the classmates who knew that fact. That's because Shimizu himself thoroughly hid it. There was no need to talk about his reasons. He had seen the classmates' attitude towards Hajime, that's why there was no way he could become an open otaku.

Inside class, it could be said he was just a mob character by those who

knew him well. There was no one he was especially close to, and he always quietly read a book in his seat. If he was talked to, he would give the minimum answer in a small mutter. To begin with, he kept the quiet attitude because he was bullied in junior high school. Maybe because it was the natural flow, he became a truant and stayed inside his own room every day, and he inevitable tried to create books and games to kill time. Even though his parents always worried about him, he brought otaku goods into his room every day which made his big and little brother annoyed. They even showed that in their attitudes and words, which made Shimizu feel that the comforting house became worse, the so-called losing his place to stay. With such a

gloomy environment, Shimizu thought of doing devious things to others inside his mind without letting it out on the surface. Thus he became more and more devoted into delusions and book creation.

Because he was like that, when he understood the summoning to a different world was the truth, his mind's state was as if shouting, "Here it come--!!". Even at the time Aiko protested fiercely against Ishtar, or when Kouki passionately decided to help humanity win and return to their original world, inside Shimizu's head were only the delusions of the real him doing spectacular things in this different world. He was elated because the delusions he thought as impossible had become truth, and the pattern

of being summoned to a different world where the protagonist was being unreasonably demanded was driven away from his mind.

Thus it actually became just as he expected, there was a conflict in this different world life for real. First, Shimizu certainly kept a certain cheat-like spec as a secret, but that was the same thing for the other classmates. Furthermore, Kouki was the "hero," not him and maybe because of that the women only kept coming near Kouki, and it became the saying that "he was just one of the many additional people." With this, nothing changed from the time he was in Japan. Though his wish was fulfilled, the reality that didn't become just like he hoped for made Shimizu increase

his deviousness, and his dissatisfaction was increasing in his mind.

Just why am I not the hero? Just why do the women only surround and desire Kouki? Just why is it not I, but Kouki who always gets treated as special? Even though I can do better if I am the hero. Then, the girls will accept me if I approach them... this, this satisfying condition is everyone's fault, I am the only special one, that's the egoistic idea which gnawed on Shimizu's mind.

At that time. The combat practice held in the « Orcus Great Dungeon ». Shimizu thought of it as his chance. I won't mind about anyone else. It was the same

even if they are here or not. Those classmates that treated me as background will surely notice my skill, Shimizu tried to use this opportunity... however, there was something he noticed.

He wasn't a special existence at all, there was no opportunity-like development, and he certainly would become a "dead" person in the next moment. As he was about to be killed by the Traum Soldier, he saw the "hero" who fought with a more brutal monster in the distance, and his fantasy about a different world crumbled as it made a rattling sound.

Then he witnessed the classmate who fell to "death" into the abyss, and his heart was broken. He only

interpreted things on his own convenience and his mind always kept seeing others inferior than him, so naturally his heart was not strong.

When he returned to the royal palace, Shimizu once again shut himself in his own room. However, the literacies that could cheer him up just like in his room in Japan were not here. That's why Shimizu naturally spent his time reading books around the skills and magic concerning his class, "Dark Magic-user."

Dark magic system was a magic system which acted on the others' minds and senses, it was recognized as magic that basically give bad statuses to the target in battle.

Shimizu's aptitude were such as altering the others' recognition, showing illusions, interfering with the image of the completed magic to disrupt the invocation, and with further mastering, he could make disorder in one's body control.

Thus the depression in his heart was completely blown away as he read the books, and Shimizu immediately recalled something. Can I brainwash someone if I master dark magic?, something like that. Shimizu was excited. If his assumption was correct, he could do whatever he wants to anyone. That's right, whatever he wants. The stagnating darkness spread in Shimizu's mind. Since that day, he zealously trained with undivided attention.

However, it didn't easily go his way. First, for something with strong ego like a human, he needed to continuously apply the spell for several hours or else he could not do the brainwashing. Naturally, that was if there was no resistance. As expected, there's no one who wouldn't react if he put the spell. It was necessary for him to put the target in a sleep-like state. If the target was a human, it would be too hard for him to hide and control brainwashing, circumstance-wise and time-wise. As he thought of what happened when he was found out, Shimizu couldn't help but abandoning this because of the high risk.

Shimizu drooped his shoulders, but

he immediately recalled about the reason he was summoned, the demon race could control demonic beasts. He wondered if he could brainwash the demonic beasts who moved by instinct and have small egos compared to humans. To confirm it, Shimizu went outside the Imperial Capital and repeatedly experimented on small fry demonic beasts. As the result, he proved that it was far easier to brainwash them compared to humans. To begin with, he could only do it because Shimizu was one of the cheaters and had an extremely high talent in dark magic. Previously, Ishtar had said that even if the people of this spent much time, they could only control 1-2 things.

Shimizu who had finished the

experiments in the Imperial Capital's outskirts thought it'd be good if he could control strong demonic beasts. However, he felt intimidated to go towards the dungeon frontline just like Kouki's party. Then at the time he was at lost of what to do, he heard the talk about Aiko's bodyguards. If he joined them, he'd be able to encountered a good demonic beast or so he thought.

In the end, Aiko's party came to Ul town, then he heard about the demonic beasts in the mountain ranges area in the north and he was lost in greed when he thought to make them his subordinates. In their next meeting, everyone would be in awe and respect towards his great achievement, and he'd be

treated as special or so his delusion went.

Normally, for the short amount of time of around two weeks, no matter if Shimizu was a genius in dark magic, and he used the efficient method by only brainwashing the leader of the groups, 1,000 was the limit. Moreover, it would only be those in Brutal's level in the second mountain range.

However, he was helped by a certain existence, and he was able to control Tio, who gave her power to Shimizu to efficiently brainwash even the demonic beasts in the fourth mountain range by chance. And at the same time, that certain existence promised him to reinforce

him with troops of demonic beasts every day, and Shimizu's bound of reasoning completely came off. Finally, as he was soaked in joy that he was indeed special, the large crowd in his full control was turned towards the town.

Thus as the result...

He was turned into such misery for those who saw him, and he was made to kneel in front of Aiko and the others. By the way, the reason why he looked like a defeated soldier was because Hajime dragged him using magic-driven two-wheeler on the ground which covered with demonic beasts' flesh and blood coupled with the fluttering cloud of dust. Shimizu was unconscious with the white of

his eyes displayed, and when they saw he was brought to the town with his head repeatedly hitting the ground, Aiko and the others' expressions were cramped.

By the way, their current location was in the outskirts and in this location were only Aiko, the students, several people from the bodyguard Knights and town leaders, Will, and Hajime's party. As expected, if the mastermind behind the attack was brought to the town, the commotions would become bigger and it'd be difficult to hold a conversation or so their reason. The town leaders which remained inside the town were currently busy with post treatment.

Aiko had stepped up towards

Shimizu who was collapsed with the white of his eyes shown. His appearance which wearing a black robe, following by the fact he was dragged back directly from the battlefield became unassailable proofs that he was the culprit behind the attack. It was a fact she didn't want to believe as Aiko's expression warped in sadness, and she shook Shimizu to woke him up.

David and the others told her to stop it because it was dangerous, but she shook her head to refuse them. The same thing happened with the restraint. It was released because she wouldn't be able to hold a good talk with Shimizu with that on. In the end, Aiko was only wanted to talk as a teacher and a student.

Before long, Shimizu's consciousness begin to return from Aiko's call. He looked at the surrounding with a blank look, and maybe because he understood his situation, Hah, he raised his upper body. He immediately tried to distance himself, but maybe because the damage on the back of his head, he staggered and fell on his butt, then backed away as is. With caution and abjection, he had a mixed expression with irritation excluded, and he looked around.

"Shimizu-kun, please calm down. There is no one here that will harm you... sensei only want to talk with Shimizu-kun. Just why did you do that... I don't mind if we talk about something else. Will you, let sensei

hear Shimizu-kun's feelings?"

Because Aiko matched her gaze to Shimizu, he stopped looking around. Following that, he averted his eyes and looked down then spoke with voice that couldn't be heard easily... rather he started cursing.

"Why? You still don't understand that. That's why this guys and that guys are so incompetent. Treating me like an idiot... the hero, that hero is annoying. Even though I could do better if it's me... unnoticed, and treated like a mob character... honestly, there are only idiots... that's why I thought of showing my worth..."

"You... know your place! You almost

destroy the town!"

"That's right! If you are talking about idiot, it is you!"

"Think how much you made Ai-chan-sensei worried!"

Far from reflecting, Shimizu was cursing out his dissatisfaction to the surrounding, so Tamai, Sonobe, and the other students were angry and said their objection one after another. Maybe because he was pressured by their momentum, Shimizu looked more and more down and assumed silence.

Because Aiko couldn't stand Shimizu looked like that, she tried to held down the further heating up students, and questioned Shimizu

with a voice which carried as much warm as possible.

"I see, you have a lot of dissatisfaction... however, Shimizu-kun. If it's about triumphing over everyone, that made sensei don't understand it even more. Why, did you tried to attack the town? If you attacked the town as is... a lot of people will be dead... aside on how you subdued a lot of demonic beasts, that cannot show your "worth.""

Aiko's justifiable question made Shimizu slightly looked up and his dreary, dark eyes turned towards Aiko from the gaps of his dirtied forelock which hanged down, then he floated a faint smile.

"... I can show it... if it's to the Demon race."
"Wh-!?"

Those unexpected words which came out from Shimizu's mouth made not only Aiko, excluding Hajime and his party, everyone in that place were shocked. Shimizu raised a satisfied expression when he saw their appearances, and though it was the same as before, he began to talk with a voice that stronger than the previous pressure which made him shut up.

"To capture the demonic beast, I went to the mountain range area in the north alone. At that time, I met a person from demon race. At the beginning, of course I was cautious... but that Demon race

wanted to talk to me. Then, we came to an understanding. That guy know my true worth. That's why I came to that guy... demon race's side and made a contract."

"A contract... you say? What do you mean?"

Aiko was shaken by the fact he was connected to the Demon race, their enemy in war, but she was sure that the Demon race must have coaxed her student and she asked that while restraining her anger.

Looking at Aiko, Shimizu was grinning as if he saw something amusing, then he said the impactful words.

"... Hatanaka-sensei... it is to kill

you."
"... Eh?"

For a moment, Aiko didn't understand what he had said as she spontaneously let out that silly voice. The same thing happened to everyone there, they became stupefied for a moment, they understood the meaning earlier than Aiko, and stared at Shimizu with fury in their eyes.

Shimizu ducked for a moment from the piercing glares which filled with strong anger from the students and the guard Knights, but he stopped mid-way and continued his words as if to shake off their glares.

"What's with that expression. Did you think I was used by the demon

race? In certain ways, you're a more troublesome existence than the hero... "Goddess of Good Harvest"... if I make it looked like you killed the townspeople, I will be welcomed to demon race's side as a "hero." It's that kind of contract. My ability is amazing after all. They said it'd be too wasteful for me to be under that hero. As expected, the one who understands it will understand. Actually, they also lent me strong demonic beasts, and I was able to create an army that exceeded my imagination... that's why, that's why I thought can absolutely kill you! What's with that! What the heck was that! Why an army of 60,000 was defeated! Why those weapons existed in this different world! You, just what on earth are you!"

Because of the ridicule at the beginning, Aiko could only stare blankly at Shimizu, her student when he said the word "kill," and maybe because he was agitated as he spoke, he began to shout when he looked at Hajime. Inside his eyes were something more than melancholy and abjection, the irritation because nothing went according to his desire, the hatred towards Hajime who obstructed him, following that, the envy towards that power were mixed, mixed and created his madness.

Apparently, Shimizu didn't notice the gray-haired, eye-patched boy before him was Nagumo Hajime, his classmate. To begin with, it could be said it couldn't be helped because he never talk to him...

Shimizu kept glaring and cursing at Hajime as if he would attack him at any moment, and Hajime who suddenly became the target could hear Shimizu cursing as "Even though you're just a chuuni character," and actually he got a considerably deep damage as he looked at the distance to escape the reality. His attitude could be seen as, "I don't think anything of you," so it caused Shimizu to agitated further.

Having guessed Hajime's feeling, his back was patted by Yue and her kindness made him want to cry again.

Maybe thanks to Hajime ignoring the serious mood and entering his

own world(?), Aiko was given the time to regain her sense from the impact, she took one deep breath and even without any courage to confront his rage, she didn't move from her spot then grasped Shimizu's hand, and talked quietly.

"Shimizu-kun. Please calm down."
"Wh-What's with you! Let go!"

He was surprised by the sudden touch and Shimizu immediately tried to shake her off, but Aiko said she wouldn't let go and further increased the power of her grip. Maybe because Shimizu couldn't look back at Aiko's serious gaze, he gradually calmed down as he looked down again, and his expression was hidden by his forelock.

"Shimizu-kun... I have understood your feelings. You want to be "special." Your feelings aren't mistaken. It was a natural wish for a human. Following that, you surely can become "special." After all, although your method was mistaken, it is the truth that you can do that much... however, don't go to the demon race's side. Having heard your story, that demon race was just trying to use your desire. Sensei, can't entrust her important student to that kind of person at all... Shimizu-kun. Let's do it over, okay? I don't want anyone to fight, but if Shimizu-kun wish for it, sensei will support you. If it is you, you definitely can fight as equal with Amanogawa-kun and the others. Then, some day, let's return together when we found the

method to return to Japan, okay?"

Shimizu heard Aiko speaking in silence, and before one knew it his shoulders trembled. Even the students and the guard Knights thought Shimizu was shaken by Aiko's words and began to cry. Actually, Sonobe Yuka, who famous to be easily moved to tears in the class, was already crying when she saw Aiko and Shimizu.

However, it wasn't something sweet as it wouldn't simply went her way. Aiko patted the trembling Shimizu's head with gentle expression, but Shimizu suddenly gripped the outstretched hand in return and pulled her, then he turned her over and coiled his arm around Aiko's neck. Aiko unintentionally groaned

because her arm was bound behind her and he took out a 10 cm long needle from god-knows where, then he pointed it at back of her neck.

"Don't move! Or I will pierce it!"

Shimizu shouted hysterically. His expression was twitching in convulsion, in his eyes had the same madness when he was cursing Hajime. His previously trembling shoulders was apparently from laughter.

Aiko looked in pain because she was unable pull apart Shimizu's arm which coiled on her throat. The surrounding people desperately stopped their movement after they received Shimizu's warning. From Shimizu's appearance, they

understood he would seriously do that for real. Everyone worriedly called Aiko's name with regretting tone, and Shimizu continued to ridicule them.

Incidentally, Hajime finally returned to reality at this time. Because he was on the trip to escape the reality up until now, his face said, "Oya? Since when...," because of the sudden development.

"Listen, this is a poisonous needle I got from a demonic beast in the northern mountain range! She'll only suffer for a few minute before she die if I pierce it! If you understand, then everyone must throw away their weapons and raise your hands!"

With the words from the maddened Shimizu, the surrounding people turned pale. Shimizu was grinning at the students and guard Knights who completely couldn't move, and he turned his glance towards Hajime.

"Oi, you, chuuni bastard, you! Not on your back! I am talking about you! Don't take me for a fool, you bastard! If you keep joking around, I'll really kill her! If you understand, give me your gun! The other arms too!"

Because the way Shimizu called him was too cruel, he inadvertently looked back appealing, "It's not me," which ended as futile, and Hajime face looked so unpleased. In spite of

the tense situation, his attitude didn't change as he was calm, and Shimizu lost his temper because he thought he was taken for a fool again. Thus hysterically, he demanded Hajime to hand over his firearms.

Hajime returned to look at Shimizu with extremely cold eyes when he heard that.

"Well, you, to say you won't kill her... to begin with, you can't go to the demon race's side if you don't kill sensei, so you're going to kill her anyway, right? That's why I won't hand them over."

"Shut up, shut up, shut up! Just be quiet and hand them over! An idiot like you should just do what I said!

Th-That's right, hehe, oi, give me your slave too. Let her carry the firearms!"

With his calm returning, Shimizu shouted some more. Because he was too cornered, he couldn't do a normal judgement anymore. Shia, who marked down by Shimizu, was trembling and her expression displayed her disgust.

"Even if I fired three times in succession to shut you up, you'll only become more creepy... rather, Shia, even if you're disgusted don't hide behind me. He isn't that dreadful."

"But, he is really disgusting... it can be said my mind can't accept it... just look, those pimples. It's

impossible to not feel disgust."

"Well, though he wish to be a hero, his lines were the same as the thief that was killed easily by the protagonist in the very beginning after all."

Though the person in question couldn't hear because they lowered their volumes, everyone could hear them because as her disgusted eyes and their volumes were becoming louder. Shimizu could only flapped his mouth and his complexion gradually dyed in red, then it changed to blue, and in the end it turned white. It was an example of the change in complexion because of the anger which became too high.

Shimizu began to mutter, "I am a hero, I am special, this guys and that guys are just idiots, everything are those guys' fault, there's no problem, everything will go as I wished, I am a hero after all, I am special," with hollow eyes, following that, he suddenly let out a high-pitched laugh as if he was shaken free of something.

"... Shi-Shimizu-kun... let us talk... after all... everything is okay..."

Even though Aiko was in pain as she was exposed to Shimizu's crazed antique, she let out those words, and at the moment he heard that, Shimizu completely stopped his laugh and strangled Aiko further.

"... How annoying. Stop trying to be a good person, you hypocrite. Just shut up and become a tool for me to escape from here."

Shimizu muttered that with a dark tone and he looked at Hajime again. Without any agitation or other expressions, he looked at Hajime with eyes filled with negative feelings, next he saw the gun in the holster on his thigh. What he wanted was transmitted without the need for words. If he falter here, he could just disregard his life and death and, no, his good future would be only a dream if he didn't harm Aiko.

Hajime leaked a sigh, he thought to fire the wire when he passed the gun and used "Lightning-clad" even

if Aiko got involved, but he slowly reached Donner-Schlag so as to not stimulated Shimizu. Because Aiko body was small, she couldn't become a shield, and it was possible for Hajime to hit Shimizu before he realize with his drawing speed, he thought it'd be okay to be looked by Aiko with slightly hurt eyes.

But, at the moment Hajime started to drop his hand, the situation suddenly changed.

"Kh!? Don't! Avoid it!"

As she shouted that, Shia strengthened her body to the best of her ability and momentarily achieved a high-speed movement on Ground Shrinker level, and she jumped towards Aiko.

Because of the abruptness, Shimizu immediately tried to pierce the needle into Aiko. Shia was doing the impossible by pulling Aiko and twisted her body to protect her from something, then a blue colored water current penetrated through Shimizu's chest and that laser-like thing passed over the place in which Aiko's head where a while ago almost simultaneously.

Hajime, who was inside the trajectory, used Donner to defend against the laser of water that probably the offensive magic called "Break" from water system. Then about Shia, she vigorously charged as she embraced Aiko closely, as is, she slipped and dived into the ground with her shoulder. She

raised a dust storm, and Shia who finally stopped, "Uguh," raised a pained groan and remained lying.

"Shia!"

Among everyone who was stiffened by the sudden development, Yue ran with all of her might as she called Shia's name. Following that, she took a position to protect Shia and the woman she embraced, Aiko from another attack.

Hajime didn't say anything and only thanked and praised Yue in his mind because she moved just as he hoped for, then he held Donner with both hand while he used "Farsight" to trace the trajectory of that "Break." Immediately, he saw a black clothed man with pointed

ears and swept-back hair who rode on a huge bird-like demonic beast in the distance.

DOPANh! DOPANh! DOPANh! DOPANh! DOPANh! DOPANh!

In a flash, Hajime successively fired the railgun towards the flying demonic beast and the silhouette. The man with swept-back hair, as if he had anticipated the attack, made the bird-like demonic beast desperately evade by doing barrel roll as he confirmed Hajime's location. It was quite an agile demonic beasts, but it couldn't evaded everything and one of the bird-like demonic beast's leg was blown off, the swept-back man's shoulder was also blown off. Even so, rather than falling, its speed

didn't slowed and it aimed to escape at full speed. It could only said the way it escape from the series of attacks as nothing but splendid.

Hajime guessed that the man probably the person from Demon race from Shimizu's talk. The man already detoured to the town in low altitude as if he was making the town as a shield, then vanished. From the method he used to escape from Hajime's bullets, it seemed the information about Hajime and his party were already known by the Demon race which made Hajime raised a bitter expression. Because he escaped towards Uldeia lake, it'd be too difficult to pursuit him using unmanned reconnaissance plane if he escaped through the forest. Above all, that's not his current

priority.

"Hajime!"

Maybe because Yue had also guessed the enemy escaped, she called Hajime with a voice which contained impatience unlike the usual.

Hajime put Donner back into the holster, and ran up to Shia without even looking at the collapsed Shimizu. Shia was faced-up as she was rested on Yue's laps and her expression warped in pain. Aiko beside her also showed similar expression as she was embraced by Yue.

"Ha-Hajime-san... ukh... I... am... okay... p-please, sensei-san was...

grazed by the poisonous needle..."

There was a hole with three centimeters in diameter in Shia's flank. Even though the bleeding was suppressed by body strengthening, it could be understood that she was in considerable pain from the amount of sweat flowed in her face. However, she floated a forced smile and told to give priority to Aiko with a shaking voice.

When he saw Aiko, her complexion was completely paled, and her limbs began to convulse. Maybe because she heard Shia and Hajime's conversation, Aiko desperately shook her neck, appealing to let Shia treated first. She couldn't let out any word

because the poison had already spreaded. If Shimizu's words were correct, she only had several minutes, no, it'd be less than a minute looking from Aiko's appearance. She didn't want to make more trouble as it was already too late.

Hajime averted his gaze away from Aiko and unhesitatingly nodded at Shia, then he let out a vial from "Treasure Box." At that time, the surrounding people finally ran up towards Hajime and the others with uneasy expressions as they let out cries from their mouths. The students, David, and the Knights were particularly shaken, they were half in panic. They were asking Hajime about her safety, stepped back when they saw her

appearance, and tried to cast recovery magic which was ineffective... towards such people, Hajime's one word, "Silence," with killing pressure made them stepped back and keep silent.

Even Hajime was slightly surprised by what he had said. His anger because Shia's injury was more than he expected. Apparently, without him noticing it, he had recognized her as an important companion deep in his heart. Therefore, he was unbearably angry towards the Demon race that came in contact with Shimizu and himself who had forgotten the possibility of him still nearby.

If he do something to Aiko and the others when Hajime's party went to

the frontline, the possibility it become a chaos was high. However, because he actually didn't do anything, he was convinced that he didn't want to do it directly, without any basis to it.

As a matter of fact, that demon race person have thought to assassinate Aiko when Shimizu was on rampage, but he lost the chance because he was stupefied by Hajime's party which was out of the normal. Afterwards, as he was looking for a chance, the talk between Shimizu and Aiko started. Thus he thought to leave killing Aiko to Shimizu as he looked from the distance, but he guessed that Aiko would be recaptured in the last moment by the unstandard Hajime, so he cast a magic which

specialized in penetration to pierce Shimizu and Aiko.

However, even though the Demon race was quick to see that opportunity, there was one miscalculation. That was, if thing went well the trajectory would make it hit Hajime and the others, erasing those risk factors at the same time, but Shia's peculiar magic was activated. That was "Foresight." Shia who was behind Hajime naturally would be hit by the trajectory along with Shimizu, Aiko, and Hajime, so she dashed out to "break" the future she saw.

Thanks to that, the future where the attack went through Aiko's head and she immediately died was avoided. Shia had put her body in

the line to change that future. Even though he was doubtful on why she put her life for Aiko who wasn't not intimate with her, Hajime would not treat an important companion who had worked her best coldly. Therefore, he unhesitatingly used the scarce "Holy Water" for Aiko. Because there was no time, it was the most certain thing to use.

Hajime held Aiko who was supported by Yue, put the vial in her mouth and poured the holy water little by little. Aiko looked at Hajime who didn't take Shia as the top priority with criticizing glare, but ignored by Hajime. Currently, he prioritized Shia's will than Aiko's or his own intention. That's why he just poured the holy water as discussion wasn't necessary.

However, Aikos' whole body began to convulse and couldn't be moved as she desired, so she couldn't swallow the water. Rather, it was possible to enter the lungs and made her vomit.

Hajime judged it was impossible for Aiko to swallow the holy water by herself, he put the remaining holy water inside his mouth, and he unhesitatingly poured it directly into Aiko's mouth.

"Kh!?"

Aiko opened her eyes wide. Next, screams and angry voices raised by everyone in Hajime's surrounding. However, Hajime ignored all of those and he twined his tongue that invaded Aiko's mouth, then he

forcefully poured the holy water. Hajime's expression didn't contain any shame or guilt, there was only seriousness about doing what had to be done.

Before long, Aiko's throat moved as to swallow and the holy water flowed inside her body. Following that, the pain which attacking her body and the cold feeling as her life was going to be washed away were blown away as if a fire was lighted in her core and started to spread around. Aiko remembered the feeling of being soaked inside the hot spring in the cold winter, and her body shook. It was just as expected of the holy water. It was a miraculous water that prevent his body broken from eating the flesh and blood of demonic beasts. The

effect was preeminent.

Not long after, the mouth to mouth ended just in the blink of time, and Hajime separated his mouth from Aiko's. Silver colored string appeared between the two. Hajime observed Aiko. His purpose was to ascertain that she had escaped from the crisis. On the other side, Aiko was still looking at Hajime blankly as her eyes were unfocused.

"Sensei."
"..."

"Sensei?"
"..."

"Oi! Sensei!"
"Fue!?"

Hajime called Aiko to ask her condition, but Aiko keep blankly looked at him and unmoving. Hajime was irritated, so he lightly slapped her cheek and raised his volume, then she raised an indescribably lovely voice and regained her senses.

"How's your body? Are there any sense of incompatibility?"

"Heh? A, um, that's, I am o-o-o-okay. There is no abnormality, rather I feel good... wait, th-that's wrong! By no mean that, th-that thing feel good, what I mean was the medicine's effect-"

"I see. Then, that's good."

Hajime looked as if he'd lose his

temper, and answered simply towards Aiko who said there was no abnormality in her physical condition, then he simply removed the hand which supported Aiko and moved towards Shia.

Although she was stupefied by Hajime's attitude, Aiko didn't stay in that spot and she had run towards Shia before she aware of it.

Hajime took out another holy water and poured half of it directly into Shia's wound, and the other half was brought close to Shia's mouth to let her drink it. The injured parts make a small shuu- sound and recovered rapidly, but somehow Shia didn't want to drink the holy water and shook her head.

"Ha-Hajime-san..."

"Shia, wha-..."

"Me too... it'll be better... guh... to do it mouth to mouth..."

"Y-you are always like this..."

As she was drenched in sweat because of the pain, Shia leaked out her desire. Even if I am rolled around, I won't get up until you do that!, she said those kind of demand, and even Hajime was amazed by this. As expected, there's no need to purposely do mouth to mouth because it was unnecessary, so he ignored the silent complaint from Yue who was nice to Shia recently and thrust the vial into Shia's mouth.

"Muguh!? ... gulp gulp... puhah... Uu~, Hajime-san is unfair... I am jealous of sensei-san..."

"Hajime... bad."

"Fue!? Sh-Shia-san, you're wrong! That's a lifesaving action! It is different from what Shia-san want! I am a teacher after all!"

She received sulky gaze and words from Shia and scolding from Yue to read the mood, but Aiko whose face redden purposely made excuses, and Hajime could only let out, "Haa~", a profound sigh which contained both relief and amazement.

Following that, the outfielders who

had guessed thing had settled began to make noise again because, everyone probably recalled the pitiful existence which had been forgotten. It was particularly important for Aiko. So Aiko probably didn't forget him and just didn't understand what had happened all of a sudden.

Hajime called out to a guard Knight who was nearest to Shimizu.

"... You, is Shimizu still alive?"

With those words, everyone went "Ah," with expressions as if they just remembered about him and they looked at the collapsed Shimizu. Only Aiko displayed a perplexed look and said, "Eh? Eh?," as she looked around, she might've

recalled the situation when Shia snatched her. With mixed complexion, she panicky run towards Shimizu.

"Shimizu-kun! Aa, this is... so cruel."

In Shimizu's chest was a hole similar to Shia's. The bleeding was intense, and there was a big pool of blood... he probably only had a few minutes left.

"I-I don't want to die... h-help... if it's like this... no... I can't believe it..."

Shimizu spoke to Aiko who held his hand by his side, it was just monologue of words which couldn't be understood in a muttering whisper. Aiko looked at the

surrounding for help, but all of them averted their eyes. It was already hopeless. Moreover, the expressions of not wanting to help vividly appeared on them.

Aiko clinged to the last straw as she looked back and shouted to the Hajime who was there.

"Nagumo-kun! That medicine from before! If it is now-! Please!"

Hajime had expected Aiko's words and muttered, "It really came to this...," along with a sigh, then he moved towards Aiko and Shimizu. Following that, he questioned Aiko even though he know what the answer would be.

"Do you want to help him, sensei?

He was going to kill you, you know? I think it had crossed the limit no matter how much a "teacher" you are."

He was someone who tried to kill her, but she protected him just because he was her student, just how many people could became a "teacher" like her in such desperation. She might already be at an abnormal level for a "teacher." Aiko accurately read the meaning behind his question, her eyes shaken for a moment, then she answered in a firm expression.

"Certainly, it might be as you had said. No, it is surely as you had said. However, I just want to be that (...) kind of teacher. I will be the students' ally no matter what

happen, I have vowed to become that kind of teacher. Therefore, Nagumo-kun-..."

Hajime became ill-humored as he scratched his head because the answer just as he expected, and he sighed in reluctance because that's just how Aiko-sensei was. Following that, he looked at the sky as he thought of something for a while, he took one deep breath and went towards Shimizu's side with a resolute expression.

"Shimizu. Can you hear me? I have something that can save you."

"!"

"However, there's something I want to ask first."

"..."

Hearing the words he could be saved, Shimizu responded by stopping his mutters and his wandering eyes were staring at Hajime. In a beat, Hajime asked a simple question.

"... Are you... an enemy?"

Shimizu immediately shook his head without any hesitation. Following that, he floated a smile of abjection and began to plead for his life.

"I-I am not your enemy... I-I won't do... anything... I will do whatever you want... so help me, I-I'll even give you an army... and even... brainwash the women... I-I swear... I

swear to be loyal... I'll do anything... so help me..."

With those words, Hajime became expressionless. Following that, he could be seen looking into Shimizu's eyes quietly as if trying to confirm his real intention. Shimizu who thought he was seeing the depth of his heart immediately looked away. However, Hajime was able to confirm it. There's darkness and impurity more than before inside Shimizu's eyes. They were saturated by hatred, anger, envy, desire, and other negative feelings, they were just like the deep sea where the light did not reach.

Hajime was convinced. Aiko's words didn't even reach Shimizu's mind. Therefore Shimizu would

surely become their enemy. He had determined that. For a moment, his gaze matched Aiko's. Aiko was also looking at Hajime and their gaze met. Following that, Aiko was immediately able to guess what Hajime was going to do. Her expression changed and she jumped out to stop Hajime.

"DON'T!"

However, Hajime was much faster.

DOPANh! DOPANh!

"Kh!?"

The sound where a breath was taken away. It wasn't known who let that out. One in the head and one in the heart. The bullets which

accurately shot made Shimizu's body jumped for a moment, and they awarded him with death.

Inside the lingering gunshot, no one let out a word, and they could only watch Hajime silently looking at the corpse with a gun in one hand that raised white smoke, in blank surprise. Silence ruled their vicinity, within those who could not move, a mutter was leaked.

"... Why?"

It was Aiko. In a blank surprise, she watched the remains of Shimizu who had began his travel to the death, and she raised that question. Hajime looked away from Shimizu and he looked at Aiko. At the same time, Aiko matched Hajime's gaze

again. Inside her eyes, anger, sadness, distrust and others feelings were raised and disappeared, then they raised and disappeared once again.

"He is an enemy after all."

Hajime's answer towards Aiko's question was truly simple.

"That! Shimizu-kun is-..."

"Reforming? Sorry to burst your bubble, I am not so good natured to believe that, above all my eyes aren't clouded at all."

When he asked the last question, Shimizu's eyes was telling him that he had "fall." Before death, his mind still moved towards killing Aiko,

Hajime thought Shimizu could slightly change his way of life because just like the time when Hajime almost fell, there's Yue's existence that was capable of holding and retaining him, so... he questioned Shimizu with that thought in mind. If that was so, he had consider to give Shimizu a chance by putting into him a collar and letting Aiko take custody of him. However, even before death, Shimizu's eyes didn't even show such sign.

Aiko should also feel that. However, Aiko was the "teacher," by no means could she abandon him. She just couldn't do that.

"Therefore, rather than killing him-! If he is kept inside the royal palace,

and returned together with us to Japan, possibly... there's the possibility-!"

"... Even if I tried to give you a reason, I know sensei won't agree to it at all. I have killed sensei's important student. It's okay for sensei to decide whatever you want to do about me."

"... Such a thing is-"

"'A lonely way of life.' I've thought of various things because of sensei's words. However, in this world where a person's life is cruelly light, I thought of not showing any mercy towards my enemy... and I won't change that. I don't think I want to change that. I have no time for that."

"Nagumo-kun..."

"I'll do the same thing from now on. At the times I think it is necessary... I'll pull the trigger no matter how many times it'll be. If you thought I was mistaken... sensei only has to do what you want... however, I want you to remember one thing. Even if it's sensei or the other classmates... I'll pull the trigger if you become my enemy..."

Aiko looked down as she bit her lip. It was no one but Aiko who said, "Having heard my talk, I won't refute whatever your decision is." No more word coming out. Hajime looked at such Aiko and he turned his feet because the things needed to be done here had finished. Yue

and Shia quietly nestled close to him. Accompanied with Pressure, Hajime looked at Will, Aiko, and the other's appearances, and because there's also the matter of post treatment, they silently followed Hajime in painful reluctance.

The town leaders and Knights' had a purpose to detain Hajime and his artifacts, but because of the overflowing "Pressure" and remembering the previous monster-like fight, they withdrew their hands and swords.

"Nagumo-kun!... Sensei is... sensei is..."

Even if her words weren't continued, he called out Hajime's

name because of her pride as a "teacher." Hajime stopped for a while and spoke to Aiko over his shoulder.

"... Sensei's ideal is already a fantasy. However, we are glad that sensei remains as our teacher even if the world had changed... if possible, please don't give up."

Following that, this time he didn't stop and came off from the surrounding circle, he took out magic-driven four-wheeler and escaped from there when everyone had boarded it.

Afterwards, what remained was the clamor from the town that was joyed for their survival and the the indescribably subtle mood.

Chapter 64: Inside the Returning Vehicle

* * *

The magic-driven four-wheeler dashed onto the highway while raising a storm of dust, with the Northern Mountain Ranges at its back. Because it was a road treaded by many people over the span of many years, it was in far better condition compared to the road from UI town to the Northern Mountain Ranges area. Thanks to the suspensions he installed, the vibrations were dulled and the four-wheeler advanced smoothly

towards Fhuren.

Shia was seated in the front seat and her rabbit ears were flapping in the wind thanks to the fully opened windows. She looked somewhat displeased since she liked the two-wheeler more than the four-wheeler. After all, she liked the feeling of her rabbit ears cutting through the wind and embracing Hajime while resting her face on his shoulder.

Naturally, Hajime was the driver. The seat beside him was, of course, Yue's. Will was seated in the back seat.

Will anxiously asked Hajime, while slightly leaning his body forward, "Excuse me~, was it really okay to

leave them like that? If you only spoke a little more about it... especially towards Aiko-dono..."

Without turning his head, Hajime answered indifferently, "Nn~? Not really, everything is okay. After all, there would be only more trouble if I stay there... Sensei can also make good decisions even if I am not there."

"... It's probably as you said, but..."

"You... setting aside whether or not you're a good person... aren't you too concerned about others?"

Even though he heard Hajime's words, Will still wore an anxious expression, which made Hajime smile wryly. To truly be in pain and

crying for the dead adventurers, not to mention remaining in an unrelated town about to be attacked by a large crowd of demonic beasts which was normally thought of as suicidal. To forgive Tio, who was the object his grudge, and now he was worried about the relationship between the one who half-threatened him; Hajime and Aiko and the others. He was a noble from the Kingdom, and he was extremely eccentric, as he was aiming to become an adventurer. However, even more than that, he was a good-natured person who cares about everything.

"... A good person."
"A good person~."
"Umu, a good fellow."

Will showed a complex expression towards those words said simultaneously. Although he was praised, it was an indescribably subtle evaluation for women to think of a man as "a good person."

"P-Please stop talking about me... I only wanted to ask you for a full explanation of your reasoning..."

"... Reasoning?"

With no more than a subtle expression while he scratched his cheeks, Will continued to talk. However, Hajime's eyebrows twitched in reaction to Will's words.

"That's right. About Aiko-dono, who was probably left with ill-feelings and about why the boy called

Shimizu was killed... The reason for your actions."

"...Didn't I explain it already? He was an enemy..."

"That's the reason you "killed" him and not the reason why you "can't save" him, right? After all, he had already received a mortal wound at that time, and he would be dead in a few minutes if you just left him... There should be a reason as to why you purposely killed him, right?"

"... You unexpectedly observed the situation rather well."

What Will pointed out hit the bullseye. He was a classmate, so the impact when Hajime killed him while Aiko pleaded for help was too

strong. Thus, the fact that it wasn't necessary for Hajime to kill him was well hidden. Will, who noticed that fact, could be said to carry the "eyes" of a noble. Hajime's tone carried admiration towards Will who wasn't deceived.

Even Shia, who had her face out the window to enjoy the wind said, "Now that you mentioned it, I also noticed that," and she turned to look at Hajime, who was driving, with a knowing look. Hajime hesitated a little on how to answer the question, but Yue answered them before he could say anything.

"... Hajime is a tsundere."
"..."
"""Tsundere?"""

Maybe because Yue hit the nail on the head, Hajime kept a poker face and continued his silence. The other members could only parrot her.

"... Repaying Aiko? In other words, you were just worried about her?"
"... That's just a coincidence."

From how Hajime curtly answered and looked the other way, it seemed like Yue's guess was right on the mark, so Shia and the others asked for an explanation.

Because Hajime didn't want to answer them, Yue answered in his stead. In short, he tried to avert Aiko's mind from feeling responsible for Shimizu's death.

Shimizu had said it before. The purpose of meeting the demonic race was to kill "Goddess of Good Harvest," Aiko. In other words, Shimizu was used to kill Aiko. Even the last attack went through Shimizu's body to kill Aiko.

Of course, Aiko wasn't responsible for Shimizu's death. Shimizu sold his soul to the demon race on his own will, which resulted in his death. Because it was the result of his own decision, Shimizu himself was responsible for it. Even if he wasn't responsible for it, it was the responsibility of the one from demon race who mortally wounded Shimizu.

However, would Aiko agree to it? After all, the last attack was aimed

at Aiko. That was the reason why she felt strongly responsible. Aiko always thought of her students first. Shimizu died because she involved him. In effect, wasn't it her fault Shimizu was dead?, she might think in such a way. Thus he thought, can Aiko's mind endure it?; Hajime felt a slight fear.

Even Aiko should feel unease and fear as human who was summoned to a different world. Although she didn't lament as she cowered and trembled in fear, the reason she could work so hard was because she had her pride as a "teacher." In addition, there were "students" who occupied Aiko's mind as a "teacher."

And a student had died because of her. The impact was greater than

when she had heard Hajime had died, or the time when Hajime said the cause was the backstabbing of a classmate. It would be a much stronger blade to damage Aiko's heart. It might even break her.

Hajime calculations would be affected if Aiko was broken, but he was definitely worried about her. Hajime had felt that Aiko's words were an impossible ideal, because they gave birth to a lot of contradictions.

Even so, the words said by Aiko made him think it was definitely be necessary for Yue and Shia's future happiness. That's why even if the world had changed, and even if Hajime had changed, the "preaching" of Hajime's "teacher"

made him feel indebted to her.

Therefore Hajime killed Shimizu even though he would die soon enough even if he was left alone. Making a strong impression, emphasizing that Shimizu was an "enemy". This was followed by making an impression of Hajime being the one who killed Shimizu. Aiko's heart shouldn't break down. He thought it was his duty so his "teacher" wouldn't change.

"So that's what happened... Fufu, what a tsundere Hajime-san is."
"So that's what happened..."
"Indeed~, Master is unexpectedly cute."

Yue finished her explanation to the other members, and their eyes

carried warmth as they looked at Hajime, but Hajime kept looking the other way.

"... But, I think Aiko noticed it."
"..."

Hajime silently turned his gaze to Yue. Yue returned Hajime's glance with gentle eyes.

"... Aiko is Hajime's teacher. A person whose words remained in Hajime's heart. That's why there's no way she didn't notice..."

"... Yue."

"... It's okay, Aiko is strong. The situation will definitely end how Hajime desired it."

"..."

Apparently Yue trusted Aiko because Aiko could at least have Hajime focus on himself. Something she couldn't do. Towards Yue who watched him with an upward gaze, Hajime responded by gently narrowing his eyes. Because of Yue's words, his worries about Aiko and future developments which clouded his mind cleared.

"Haa~, to create the world where only the two of you existed... no matter how much time passes, I will also create such atmosphere..."

"Th-This, what can I say... I somehow feel something sweet in my mouth..."

"Muu~ this one wants thee to abuse this one, but... even this kind of situation isn't bad..."

Will and the others felt uncomfortable because of Hajime and Yue's sweet atmosphere. Shia in particular was puffing her cheeks and pouting in distaste.

Yue noticed Shia and shifted her gaze towards her, and once again matched Hajime's gaze to silently appeal to him. The content was none other than "Shia's reward." Without Shia's peculiar magic; "Foresight" and her desperate action, Aiko would have become someone who couldn't return because of a hole in her head. Shia had saved Hajime's teacher.

Because he understood, Hajime let out an "Uh," moved his gaze away from Yue, looked at Shia and said, "... Shia. That's, well, you saved us. Though it's belated,... thank you."

"... Who?"

The result of him saying his gratitude while enduring his embarrassment were those words along with astonished expression. Though veins popped on Hajime's forehead, he endured it because it was the consequence of his deeds.

"... Well, I think it couldn't be helped for you to take such attitude... Even so, I am seriously expressing my gratitude, you know?"

Hajime matched his gaze with Shia, who was looking at him firmly expressing his gratitude with a "Thank you." Because of Hajime straightforward words, Shia's body trembled as though an electric shock ran through her whole body, and she became restless. Her gaze excitedly wandered around while her cheeks were dyed in deep red. Her rabbit ears were swaying here and there.

"Th-that's, well, i-it's not like I've done something amazing, and it's okay if you don't say thank— A-agh! What's with this suddenness. Somehow, it feels really embarrassing... ehehe."

Hajime smiled wryly while looking at Shia's embarrassed state, and he

asked of the doubts he had.

"Shia. Though I was just a little curious about it,... why did you unhesitatingly jump out at that time? You had never talked about anything important with sensei, right? I also can't remember a timewhen you got along with her..."

"That is... because she is someone Hajime-san worried about."

"... That's all, huh."
"?... Yes, I think that's all?"
"... I see."

Because of Shia's astonished expression, Hajime expression ascertained that he couldn't say anything more. Certainly, Aiko was Hajime's teacher. His classmates

would be impacted if she was gone.

He was honestly glad she didn't die. However, he remembered he didn't show it through his speech and behavior. Nevertheless, Yue and Shia seemed to be able to read what was in Hajime's heart; they were people who always knew his heartfelt emotions. Though he only thought of it now, they had crossed the boundaries of being companions. Such understanding had crossed his mind.

Thus, even if Yue didn't say anything, he thought to repay Shia with something. And so, Hajime who was still embarrassed spoke to her.

"Shia. Is there something you

want?"
"Heh? Something... I want?"
"Ah. You can say it's a thanks or a reward... Well, something like that. Of course it's only something within my ability, okay?"

Shia was a little perplexed because of the sudden words. Since she thought what she had done was a natural thing to do for companions, she thought it was a little exaggerated. "U-U~n," she groaned and when she casually saw Yue at his side.

Yue was watching Shia with a gentle expression, and then she nodded. Her gaze told her was it was okay for Shia to honestly receive Hajime's gratitude, Yue was urging her. Shia, who accurately

read the situation, let out a forced laugh. After thinking about a little, and she turned her gaze from Yue who revealed a smile while nodding towards Hajime.

"Then, please take my first—"
"Rejected"

"... Why? No matter how much I think, finally the dere time has COMEEE!!! It is that kind of time, right? Right? Please read the mood!"

"I said, 'within my ability'."

"That's quite within your ability! Even though you always casually keep me away, you did it with Yue-san! I know it happened! My heart felt empty whenever I found out about your liaison! Woo, when we

arrive at Fhuren, I'll once again go on errand alone, and you will make love during that time, right? *Sob* Again, I alone... Killing time alone,... then I'll pretend to not see Yue-san beaming... damn it..."

"No, pl—, there's nothing to cry about... I am in love with Yue, and about you, well, I think of you as an important companion, but it's not love... For me to embrace someone else is..."

"... *Sob*... Hajime-san, you good for nothing!"

"... Oi."

"A wuss! A bastard who tricks a maiden's heart! A good for nothing! You perverted voyeur!"

The time has come!, and she was about to say her wish with joyful expression, but Shia became indignant because she was rejected even before she finished voicing request. She let out all of her dissatisfaction up until now as she curses Hajime while weeping.

From the back seat, "Pfft... The man who annihilated several tens of thousands of demonic beasts is... a good for nothing... Pfft."

"Unexpectedly, Master has a pure heart, if thou still haven't been in that kind of relationship... it means this one whose ass's first time was deprived has a step in the lead..."

Those words were heard although it

said in whisper. Hajime seriously thought, should I throw them out of this car?, for a moment. However, Yue who was sitting by his side was somehow looking at him with a criticizing gaze, and he let out a "Guh".

Following that, he spoke to Shia again with cramped cramped cheeks. In addition, he swore in his heart to punish Will later. About the other voice... he would leave her as is because he didn't want to be her companion.

"Shia. Please lower the hurdle. If it's another thing..."
"... Hajime, you can't?"

For some reason, Yue hugged Shia. Shia said with a miserable voice as

she clung to Yue, "Yue-saa~n".

Obviously, Yue seemed to allow Hajime to embrace Shia. Recently, Yue has been truly spoiling Shia. Hajime had thought it was because of a deep friendship, but somehow it became similar to a big sister helping her troubled little sister. Moreover, the elder one was a sis-con.

His beloved woman was asking him to embrace another woman. Seriously, Hajime who didn't know what this situation meant could only hold his head with both hands. However, Hajime also had something he wanted to say.

"... I, what my heart wants is Yue, only you. I don't hate Shia, I think

of her as an important companion, but... I can't treat her the same as Yue. You know, I carry the desire to monopolize Yue. No matter what reason it is, I won't allow her to be beside another man. You can think of it as being a narrow-minded or selfish, but... I want Yue to think the same as me, it's something I desire. That's why, even if it was Shia, could you pardon me from starting a relation with another woman?"

"... Hajime."

With Shia clinging to her arm, Yue's cheeks blushed and she looked straight at Hajime with moistened eyes. Hajime once again gently stroke Yue's cheek with his hand as he returned her gaze, and the two formed a sweet atmosphere anew.

Even the air's color seemed to have turned pink.

The two watched each other faces as they gradually drew closer, then...

"... It seems I... have been completely forgotten... even though it was the talk about my reward..."

Shia was scowling with a dangerous tone as she stared at Hajime and Yue who almost reached the climax. Then the two finally noticed their surroundings and hurriedly distanced themselves. Yue, who still felt embarrassed, was timidly twirling her beautiful hair to calm down.

Hajime, who confessed his feelings, had his heart thrown out of order

because of the surprise attack. His expressionlessness crumbled, and his mouth naturally stammered for an excuse. The words of him wanting to monopolize her and to be monopolized, were heavy responsibility for a person, but Yue was extremely happy. Her heart shivered and she inadvertently forgot about everything except Hajime.

"... I see, I somehow understand the relationship between the three of you... Shia-dono has it hard."

"*Annoyed*... The bond with Yue is deep... though that'll be a hindrance to this one... Well, as long as this one will be abused, then it's..."

Will's expression looked as if he

would vomit sugars as he tried to guess the relationship between the three. They didn't want to know of the existence of the pervert who started panting as she imagined something.

"... Hajime, I am sorry. But, Shia is also important... I want to repay her. So, please go out with her for a day inside the town... Can you?"

"Yue-saa~n."

Now, Yue was asking Hajime for Shia's sake. Shia, whose heart was broken had her head patted, and was now spoiledly pressing and rubbing her face against Yue. Hajime who saw their appearance answered with a wry smile.

"That's okay, I don't mind if it's just that much. It's not because Yue asked for Shia, okay? Even if Shia was the one who asked for it, I'll at least go out with her."

"Hajime-san... no, there's no need to be concerned about it, it's okay as long as it can become an established fact!"

"... Seriously, you are..."

"Well, because that's still impossible, I'll endure it for now by increasing the favorability through the date. Once we arrive at Fhuren, please take me to the Sightseeing Ward, okay?"

"Ah, ah, okay."

Because of that idea, Hajime thought to once again remind her that Yue was the only special one for him. However, Shia probably already knew, but she didn't get discouraged. With a complex expression, Hajime thought, Well, it's okay to let Shia do what she wants, as he acknowledged their date. There was no change to the fact that Shia was already an important existence for Hajime, and he could not be reluctant about it because it was something Yue asked of him. Thus, he confirmed he wanted to reward her for her hard work.

"What's with this feeling of being an outsider. It's the same feeling of slipping into another family's get-together."

"Hmm. This kind of 'Ignoring play' doesn't make this one feel happy at all... Only lonely... Rather, isn't it about the time someone responds to this one? Is it really okay for this one to be here?"

Will, who was sitting behind the front seat where the flirting and heartwarming scene had occurred, looked so uncomfortable. In addition, although no one talked to her, Tio whom participated in the previous conversation, unbeknownst to them, had boarded the carrier as she placed her head on the window where the carrier was connected to the vehicle.

Before the fight, she had asked permission to follow Hajime. In the

end, she was left behind because her existence was forgotten, so she jumped into the carrier of the magic-driven four-wheeler in a panic. The look of her panting because of her cruel treatment, while peeping into the vehicle via the window, took everyone inside the vehicle aback, and decided to treat it as though there was nothing there.

At first, he tried to shake her off by doing reckless movements with a wild-like speed just like the one in the movies, but she used magic to her advantage to stick to them. Moreover, because she became more and more excited with ecstasy, they decided to just ignore her. The pervert: the more one reacts to her, the more pleased she

became.

Because of the situation where no one responded to her, Tio was excited because she thought of it as some kind of play to ignore her. However, she began to feel the emptiness from the interaction of Hajime and the others, and finally complained to them. Even so no one respond to her, so Tio creeped into the vehicle from the window connecting the vehicle and the carrier. With her black and long hair hanging down, her appearance who slowly creeping inside was just like Sada**-san from a certain movie called 'The Ring'.

As expected, Will couldn't ignore the eeriness as he shouted, "Uwah!," and retreated to the side window.

Reacting to his voice, Hajime and his party looked at the back seat.

"Ah? Ahh~, th-this one is stuck. The breasts have become hindrances... Can't get in. Sorry, Will-boy, but can thou pull this one in?"

Her breasts, which were far bigger than Shia's, were resisting the pull as they continued to change shapes because of the window frame. Tio asked, "Please pull this one, okay?," as she stretched her hands towards Will. Hajime, who saw the situation, silently pulled Schlag from his left holster. His hand moved over his shoulder and shot without any hesitation.

DOPANh!

"HMMmm!?"

The gunshot and the projectile flew outside, hitting the Tio's forehead, and the force of impact blew her back into the carrier. A clamoring and slamming sound resounded from the carrier.

"Wh-What have thou done. To suddenly do that... wouldn't it make this one excited?"

With flushed cheeks, she rubbed her forehead with a somewhat happy expression. She complained... not. Tio, from the Ryuujin tribe, said no more than a perverted remark. Maybe because she wanted to enter with her legs first, she thrusted them into the vehicle window. However, this time,

her plump butt was stuck on the window frame, and her fascinating buttock somehow managed to get inside after some struggling.

Hajime silently fired Schlag in succession. And although he wanted to blow Tio's ass out of the vehicle, she was considerably stuck and thus didn't blown away thanks to the plump meat of her buttocks cushioning the impact. However, because she let out R18 moaning every time a bullet shot was into her butt such as "Ah, an!", "How intense!", or "Masterr~". With cramped cheeks, Hajime reluctantly stopped shooting. As expected, it was better to not become an acquainted to a pervert.

Yue, who idolized the Ryuujin race,

felt that the image she had of them was nothing but a fantasy, and had pushed them to the back of her head, and was now covering her eyes in shock.

Tio who guessed the gunfire had stopped, somehow held her butt and breasts, letting out a sigh "Fuu~," as she finally got inside the vehicle.

"Haa, haa, geez... how indiscriminating. A Master who can't be helped. But don't worry, this one will receive any kind of love. That's why... it's okay to do more of it, you know? Even more intense is okay, too, you know?"

"Shut up, pervert. Don't lean forward and do not come here. If

possible, open the door and jump outside now."

"Kh!? Haa haa... for Master to know what's best for this one... but, this one refuses. This one has already decided to follow Master. There's also the duty as Ryuujin race, and the thing about taking responsibility, there's no reason to separate. No matter what Master will say, this one will follow thee. This one definitely won't go away."

Tio who finally entered the vehicle spewed perverted words one after another, and when Hajime coldly answered her, Tio's expression looked like she was further charmed by him. However, she firmly insisted to remain. Though it was spoiled by her own expression.

"Stop joking. What responsibility. It's nothing but the continuation of a fight to the death. Just be glad you weren't killed. Besides, your duty as Ryuujin race is about that Hero. The guy is the center of this summoning, so go to him."

"Don't want to. Definitely don't want to. Though this one doesn't know what kind of person that Hero is, this one thinks he wouldn't be able to ruthlessly and mercilessly punish this one just like Master! Beside, don't belittle this one! This one has decided whom this one would call "Master." This one not so frivolous to be able to change the feelings towards this one's master."

With her eyes fully open, Tio

insisted while clenching her fists. Though it was said in a good manner, she eventually made a perverted declaration that she was happy to be treated mercilessly by Hajime.

"This one would chase thee even if thou art runs away, okay? When this one goes all over towns with the story about this one's first being snatched away. About this one's body that could no longer live without Master, doing different this and that kinds of things, it will be told along with Master's description as this one walks, okay?"

"... You are~"

With veins popped, Hajime dangerously narrowed his eyes as

he thought of her as a seriously annoying fellow. Though he thought to just kill her, she wasn't an enemy and Yue would stop him, so he thought to just keep hitting her until she lost her memory. Nevertheless, she had an authentic sturdiness, and it got nowhere because she would just feel happy rather than being blown away along with her memory.

As the result, he could do nothing but glare at her with a disgusted expression from the bottom of his heart. However, his gaze only made Tio's body convulsed even more. Her condition was already irrecoverable.

"Please don't make such disgusted face, Master. This one will surely be

useful. Though Master's party are outside of the norm, didn't this one has shown the proof during that fight? Even if this one doesn't know Master's objective, please let this one accompany Master. Please, Master."

"That's physiologically impossible."

"Ah!!!? Haa, Haa... Nnh! nnh!"

Towards Hajime's words that completely stopped the flow of conversation, Tio was embracing herself with both arms as though she was enduring something while she was fidgeting. Seeing Tio in such a manner, not only Hajime but everyone inside the vehicle displayed disgusted faces. After a while, Hajime let out a deep sigh

and his expression looked somewhat exhausted.

"... Although I want to say something, but it'll be useless no matter what I say, right? Just do whatever you want as long as you don't become a hindrance to us. I have no more energy to think about what to do with you..."

"Oh? Oo~, that's so, that's so! Hmm, then please take care of this one from now on, Master, Yue, and Shia. Just call this one Tio! Fufufu, it looks like it'll be a fun journey..."

"... Argh."

"P-Please take care of me too..."

Hajime sighed again when he

looked at a happy Tio with his narrowed eyes. Yue groaned in dissatisfaction, and the perplexed Shia returned her greeting.

A new companion. A pervert from Ryuujin race; Tio, had joined them. And the party advances towards Neutral Commercial City of Fhuren.

Chapter 65: Aiko Gone Mad

* * *

Three days had passed since Hajime and his party left Ul.

Although there were vexing problems; such as how to dispose of the corpses of the demonic beasts, and how to repair the roughened ground, the townspeople were unhurt. A result that could only be considered nothing but a miracle. The good news was immediately spread to the people who took shelter, peripheral towns, and even the Imperial Capital. The returning

townspeople met their lovers and families. Some were hugging their close friends, and the joy of their safeties wrapped Ul in a festival-like clamor.

The protective wall Hajime left behind was surrounded the town as is, and the people who were talking about the details of the fight were gesturing how it exceed the common sense similar to how storytellers talked about a myth as they looked at the roughened ground outside of the protective wall.

The people who took shelter, especially the children, had sparkling eyes when they heard the story. Without losing this opportunity, the merchants were

already calculating on how to make money by turning Hajime's protective wall into the town's new specialty.

Thus, the townspeople who didn't know anything about Hajime and Aiko believed Hajime and his party were dispatched by the "Goddess of Good Harvest," and Hajime's wall was named "Goddess's Shield" to honor it. Furthermore, the white-haired, eye-patched boy; Hajime, was called "Goddess's Sword" and "Goddess's Knight" in respect. However, it was a different story when David and the other Knights, or rather the real bodyguard Knights, recalled what was said about Aiko and Hajime. They would rampage while shouting, "As expected, I hate that guy!!!" In the

future, Hajime would writhe in agony whenever he hears his name, but that's another story.

It was somewhat a miscalculation that resulted in earning himself some embarrassing nicknames, but just as Hajime thought, Aiko's fame and popularity were through the roof. When she walked into town, all the people would turn around and focus their gazes on her. Among them, there were also some who began to worship her while saying things such as "Bless us~." In this town Aiko, who saved the people, was certainly seen as nothing less than a "Goddess." The rumor had also already spread to the surrounding towns. At the very least, it might be correct to say that Aiko's words carried more weight

than the Church of Saints' bishop, in the town of Ul.

The rumored Aiko was... safely supporting the town leaders in the town's reconstruction, but although she acted cheerful around people close to her, her mind wasn't there. The cause was the various impacts of the shocking truths Hajime had revealed before the fight. But above all, it was how Hajime killed Shimizu. The scene of that moment consumed her mind and gnawed at her heart.

Even today, after they finished their day duty and it was time for dinner, the students and bodyguard Knights were dining at "Water Fairy Inn," Aiko just mechanically carried the food into her mouth and blankly

looked some place else without registering the conversation of the others in her mind, only answering with the same reply.

"Ai-chan sensei... Ai-chan sensei's magic is amazing after all! Even those roughened ground recovered quickly... Looks like it'll return to normal in just a week!"

"... I see... that's good."

Sonobe Yuka, who noticed Aiko's mind was somewhere else, intentionally talked to her cheerfully. She tried to somehow encourage Aiko, since she knew the source of her abnormal state. However, even Sonobe's cheerful words only received an indifferent answer in return, like pre-typed-like

words. Sonobe drooped her shoulders as she said "Still won't do, huh~."

"Aiko... did the mayor or the bishop said anything today? If you're really troubled by it, I won't forgive them for troubling Aiko, even if it's the bishop. I am Aiko's Knight after all. No matter when, only I will be Aiko's ally."

"... I see... that's good."

It was unknown whether David said those words to encourage Aiko or to seduce her. The remark on how he was willing to go up against the bishop was considerably dangerous as a Templar Knight, although it might not be important to David; the warrior of love. The "I" part was

emphasized. In regards to going against anyone... it was also considered by the surrounding Knights, as they agreed with him while they directed sharp glares at their commander who casually made his advance.

However David's casual appeal was easily tossed aside like the words coming from a certain long running TV program during daytime. It was doubtful as to whether or not she heard him. The expression on the student's faces were saying "Serves you right~" to David who drooped his shoulders. The same expression was on the other Knights' faces.

Without taking any notice of the students and the Knights, Aiko indifferently continued to eat

without responding.

(...If, if only I had talked to Shimizu-kun more... If only I had noticed his feelings earlier... If I did, then something like that wouldn't have happened... If, if he relied on his classmates... If, if I didn't get taken as a hostage... If only... I died... then he wouldn't have found it necessary to kill Shimizu-kun...

Why did he kill him... Even though they were classmates... Was it simply because he was an enemy?... Could killing someone be so simple because of such a reason? Was it so simple to kill a person?... How could it be done so naturally?...

That's strange... Humans aren't demonic beasts. To be able to kill

without any hesitation... He,... was he someone who could easily kill a human?... If I left him alone, would he have been a danger to the other children?... Will the other children be safe since he's gone?... As long as he's not... Kh?!? What did I just think of!?... Stop. It's not good to think about this any further!)

Presently, regret and self-condemnation repeated themselves in Aiko's mind... Thus, if she thought of it unconsciously, the buds of fear and grudges towards Hajime would appear, she would deny them in a panic, and she would once again return to her first thoughts, repeating the process. There was too much she wanted to think about, and there were also a lot things she didn't want to think

of. Aiko's mind was similar to a library where the bookshelves had crumbled and unorganized information were scattered around in a chaotic manner.

Suddenly, a calm and warmth voice reached Aiko. "Aiko-sama. About today's dish, is it not up to your taste?"

"Eh?"

It was Foss Selo, the owner of "Water Fairy Inn." His voice was far from loud, it was actually said in a rather small voice. However, there was no one inside the inn who missed Foss's words. His calm and deep voice would reach anyone without fail. Even now, Aiko whose mind was caught in whirpool of

thought easily heard his words, and it made her senses return to reality.

When she noticed she had cried out in a rather strange and loud voice, Aiko's cheeks flushed slightly as she turned towards the smiling Foss.

"U-Umm, what was it? I'm sorry, I was daydreaming for a moment."

"No, no, don't worry about it. I just thought the dish was not to your taste because you didn't raise your face. If so, I thought of sending out another dish..."

"N-No need! The food is really delicious. I was just thinking about something..."

Although Aiko said the food was very delicious, she herself couldn't remember what it tasted like. When she looked at her surroundings, her students and the Knights were looking at her with a somewhat anxious expression. She noticed what was on their minds, and she thought she mustn't continue the way she has been acting as she pulled herself together and continued on with her meal. However, she coughed in a panic when food entered her lungs.

Because Aiko was coughing with teary eyes, the students and the Knights were panicked. Seeing the situation, Foss casually prepared napkin and water.

"I-I am sorry. To trouble yo-..."

"It is not a trouble at all."

Although Foss saw Aiko's blunder, he kept a calm smile which made Aiko feel grateful and relieved. Seeing Aiko's current state, Foss narrowed his eyes and thought of something. He spoke with a small and still calm voice.

"Umm. Aiko-sama. Though it might be presumptuous, may I ask one thing?"

"Eh? Ah, yes. What is it?"

"Why can't Aiko-sama believe what you want to believe?"

"Heh?"

Unable to understand Foss's words,

Aiko tilted her head as a question mark floated above her head. Because of that, Foss continued with a wry smile, "Looks like those words were too lacking."

"Apparently, Aiko-sama's mind is currently in serious confusion. There are too many things you want to think about, there are also things you don't want to think of, and you don't know what should you do. What's best is to do what you want, even if you're not sure of what you want yet. There are many things you don't understand, which only increases your impatience, and become the impetus towards the vicious circle of confusion. Am I wrong?"

"H-How..."

Because he had correctly guessed what she was thinking of, Aiko instantly became speechless. Seeing her reaction, Foss calmly explained with a smile, "I've seen a lot of guests, after all."

"During such times, it's better to just 'believe in what you want to believe in' for now. But then again, people will overlook things if they only want to believe what they want, those words also came with such warning. That saying is correct. However, in my opinion, people only act in what they believe in. That's why, I feel that during times when one 'can't move on,' it isn't a bad thing to 'believe in what you want to believe in'."

"... To believe in what I want to believe in."

Aiko contemplated in Foss's words. Aiko's mind was currently filled with regret and guilt which became a bud of doubt in Hajime as the hatred swirled around. Hajime was certainly Aiko's important student, but Shimizu who was also a similarly an important student to her was murdered. The moment she understood he was an existence who, according to situation, would deprive the other students of their lives. She recognized Hajime as a threat who would deprive her of her important people. Even so, Hajime was also her student, she couldn't simply cast him away. It was the same reason why she couldn't just abandon Shimizu, who tried to

commit mass murder. That's why she was confused since because didn't know what to do. Though Aiko herself thought she had a difficult personality, she couldn't help it. Hatayama Aiko was a 'teacher,' after all.

Foss didn't know what happened to Aiko. He didn't know she was, in a certain sense, believing too much in what she wanted to believe in. Even so, he could see she had committed a large blunder since she couldn't move on after what she believed in had collapsed.

While he was lost in thought, Aiko's hands had stopped from partaking of her meal and began to get absorbed in her thoughts.

(To believe in what I want to believe in. I wonder... what is it that I want to believe in? One of the things is that I want all of the students to return to Japan. However, it's something that can no longer be fulfilled. Now what I want to believe in is for it to be possible to return home without any more losses...

His story. His story where a classmate tried to kill him. I do not want to believe it... he even said he will kill us if we were to become a hindrance to him. Towards a human who unhesitatingly murdered a person... Towards the enemy who threatened the students...

Even so, I do not want to believe it.

Nevertheless, he actually killed him... killed Shimizu-kun without any hint of hesitation. That's why he's already... no, I must believe in what I want to believe in.)

Aiko closed her eyes as she tried to hold down the resurfaced dark feelings. The surrounding people were anxiously looking at her as she moved slightly while thinking of something.

('Because he's an enemy' is what he said, and 'I have no time for that'. He also feared Shimizu-kun will once again attack him and his important people if he let him live. That was something anyone would have thought of.

In reality, Yue-san and Shia-san

wouldn't put so much trust in him if he was a cruel man. He only wanted to cut off the source of anxiety for the future of those children... It was why he couldn't let him live. In other words, he thought I wouldn't be able to do anything about Shimizu-kun...

To let Shimizu-kun live would mean I should have at least showed him I could reform Shimizu-kun, in which I didn't... In the end, I was powerless... Shimizu-kun was... Even so, to be killed in that manner... It meant Shimizu-kun was already weakene—... Kh.)

There was a clear reason why Hajime shot Shimizu dead. He was not a broken human who would think nothing of murder. He was

not a monster who couldn't be understood. He wasn't an enemy who blindly harm the students. Aiko decided to believe in him because he was a 'student', and her words could still reach him. With such thinking process, she recalled the shocking scene where a student shot another student to death, and she tried to search for the reason behind it.

(That's right. I had forgotten it until now. To begin with, I was the one who asked him to help the dying Shimizu-kun, and that was the result. Shimizu-kun would have died even if he didn't do anything. It was completely unnecessary for him to purposely shoot him! So why?! Why did he do that?! To make sure he dies? No, there's no

need for him to do such a thing. That child only had a few minutes left to live, it was why I asked him for his help, but there's nothing more left to be done. After all, there was nothing I could do... Shimizu-kun was shot because of me— Kh!?)

Aiko opened her eyes widel She was aghast by the truth she had just noticed.

(... That's right. Shimizu-kun received the wound from the attack aimed at me. If nothing was done during that time, I would have surely died. It was my fault he had to die! But everyone was convinced Shimizu-kun was killed by him! He was the one who convinced us of it!)

It was her fault, it was her who killed her own student. Just like Hajime feared, Aiko finally realized the truth and paled in an instant. The existence of her students were Aiko's supporting pillars. The fact that she was the cause of one of her student's death broke Aiko's mind. The impact of the fact made her mind unintentionally turn on its defensive mechanism, and Aiko's mind blanked out. With her outlook wrapped in darkness, she thought of giving herself to the darkness. However, the words Hajime left behind revived her mind.

"If possible, please don't get demoralized."

At that time, her mind didn't understand it because of

consecutive impacts. Even though it was troublesome to think well of the meaning behind those words, they were simple words if she thought hard enough.

(If, if he said those words because he had predicted my situation... Wasn't he worrying about me?... I, he noticed I would break down because I realized I was the cause of Shimizu-kun's death. That was the reason why... he unnecessarily shot him... to convince us it was he who killed him... so I wouldn't be crushed by guilt... to keep being a teacher...)

Aiko understood Hajime's sense of values. Therefore, she didn't think it was done entirely for her sake. Even so, there's no denying Hajime had

rushed into action because he thought of Aiko. The closing of the door in Aiko's mind was immediately stopped right before it completely shut, and it began to slowly open once again. Her narrowed view once again broadened. Though there was still the cold feeling like one of the coldest season inside her mind, but at the same time, there certainly was a small fire present.

(Looks like I was being protected by him... No, not only him, but a lot of people have protected me. The children by my side are protecting me even now. I only thought of protecting him, but I didn't realize I was also being protected... How immature of me. That's now's not the right time for me to keep trying

to be independent...)

Aiko wore a resolute expression. However, her thoughts involving Shimizu-kun and the fact that she was the reason he was killed wouldn't disappear for the rest of her life. Even so, she couldn't just stand still because there were students who adored and relied on her as their teacher; she didn't want to. Aiko renewed her vow to do the things she could do as a 'teacher', even if the world had changed. In addition, she also engraved in her mind to not let her current ideals be shaken. There is already, without a doubt, fear or grudge against Hajime.

(He's a clumsy one... He understood I might hold a grudge against him,

or I might even become his enemy... Now that I think about it, he received my words and it looked like he thought it over seriously... Could this possibly be his way of returning a favor?

When I think back, I've only been saved by him. He told me the truth, and in the end, he even saved this town. Moreover, during the battle, he fulfilled his promise and brought Shimizu-kun back. If I reconsidered those things, I've only been unreasonable. I only talked of my ideals... and I've pressured him with that... How truly immature of me. Even so, he saved us... even though his way of thinking is cold... Looks like parts of his previous self still remained... No, at the very least, he regained some of them, right?

Could it be because of those girls?)

Once again, Aiko smiled wryly as she thought of becoming indebted to him. Even though her immaturity was shameful as teacher, she smiled as remembered the Hajime who had sluggish status in the beginning, transforming into a truly dependable man. Thus, even though Hajime had completely changed, she felt happy when she caught a glimpse of his previous self.

But at the moment, she guessed the reasons were Yue and Shia, the girls who were always close to Hajime's side. Aiko somehow felt a pain in her heart. Aiko inclined her neck, but she immediately thought of it as nothing but her imagination.

(Incidentally, I still haven't said my thanks to Shia-san who protected me. Even though she is someone I owe my life to... Next time, I must properly make sure to thank her... In addition, I also owe my life to him...)

About the poison and the raging development, Aiko reflected. She had not thanked Shia, and the other benefactor of her life, Hajime. It was only now that she recalled something sealed in the corner of her memory, and she blushed as though fire came out of her face.

(Th-That's just an artificial respiration! A lifesaving measure! There's absolutely nothing more than that! I-It's not like such an intense thing was my first time. I

never thought of it as pleasant! Yup, I absolutely never thought of it like that!)

When she thought of the reason behind her flushed face, Aiko suddenly began to beat the table. She repeated her excuse to no one in particular.

In addition, even though Aiko was an adult, she didn't have any experience in love. Even so, it was true that with her lovely looks, speech, and behavior changed, becoming like someone who was seriously in love. After all, in Japan, there were only 'gentlemen,' who treated her seriously because of her teenage-like appearance. Aiko knew there were a lot of men who thought of her appearance as good,

but most of them ended up as good friends because none of them wanted to experience shame in being labeled as something beginning with 'Lo'.

Since it was not unusual for people in their earlier teens to marry in this world, no one was bothered by Aiko's short height and childish face; the so-called a little girl's appearance. So even though David and the other Knights were serious,... her small experience in love and her small stature made her believe no man would be interested in her, since she didn't even notice the love call clearly sent by men from this different world.

Thus, the mouth to mouth life-saving measure Hajime had quite

the impact on Aiko. She calmed her mind, and once again recalled the things that wouldn't get out of her head.

(... To begin with, he already has girlfriends named Yue and Shia... There were already two, so it doesn't matter if it increases by one. Just what I am saying?! I am a teacher! He's a student! Wait, that's not the problem! It's not like he thinks of me like that! Besides, he somehow managed to casually two-time! Illicit sexual relationships are forbidden! That's insincere! Love should only be one way!... To have two at the same time... Kh, how shameless! I won't allow such immoral relationships! Hmph, I won't allow it!)

The sound of her beating the table became louder.

(... But his feelings towards Yue-san is quite special. Though her style isn't so different from me... Could it be that h-he likes child-like women? F-For example, like me? No, no, no, what am I thinking! So what if I know his tastes! To begin with, he is eight years younger... Now that I think about it, aren't people from the Vampire race like Yue-san have a long lifespan? In other words, he likes child-like older woman? Wait, so what if I knew that! Return to your senses, Hatayama Aiko! You are a teacher! He is a student! You are disqualified as a teacher if a little kiss makes you confused!)

Maybe because she was done beating the table, she held her face with both hands, began shaking her head while saying 'No, no', once again she beat the table, continued with another 'No, no', and finally she shouted "I am a teacher—!!," as she began to pound the table with her forehead.

As expected, even the students and bodyguard Knights; the group who loves Aiko, was taken aback by her eccentric behavior. When Foss noticed Aiko, who started a one-man show, he said, "Oh my, looks like you've cheered up," with his unchanging calm smile. What a big person.

Afterwards, Aiko was able to come to terms with her feelings towards

Hajime about this and that, and self-concluded that was only a temporary hesitation caused by unstable emotion. Thus, there's no change, Hajime was her student. While it was necessary to deliver information about Hajime to the top management in Church of the Saint and the Kingdom, she also needed to be prepared to protect Hajime from them in case of emergency, since she was determined to return to the Kingdom.

Aiko didn't notice it. The thing about Hajime wasn't concluded, it was just put on hold. While she called the students in her mind as "that child," only Hajime was called "he."

Thus the feeling began to bud. The time when Aiko finally took notice of it would be a little bit more in the future...

Chapter 66: Once Again in Fhuren

* * *

There was no change in liveliness of Neutral Commercial City, Fhuren.

From the other side of the tall and gigantic wall, the town's clamor reached considerable distance, all the way to outskirts. There was also no change with the long lines on the gates. From tourists to merchants who were visiting because of business, and there were also all kinds of listless people because of the torment of waiting for their turns.

There was a man who gave off a gaudy feeling standing at the end of the line of people by the entrance where the inspection was taking place. He was accompanied by two flashy women, one on each side, who were also listless as they waited for their turn in dissatisfaction while sweating. For the time being, would it be better to ask them what happened or just watch them? – they gave off such a mood. Then, they talked about silly things such as how to improve their waiting condition to reach their turn faster when suddenly; the gaudy man heard an unfamiliar sound to his ears.

SCREECH!!!

In the beginning, the gaudy man ignored it as he tried to lift the mood of the two women by his side. However, when the merchants and two women beside him became pop-eyed while looking behind him, coupled by the sound getting gradually louder, he turned towards the highway and said, "What!"

Thus he also became pop-eyed as he saw the scene of a black box running on the highway as it created raging storm of dust. The people quickly raised a ruckus. Though there were those who tried to run away as they shouted 'Demonic beast!', the speed of the box-like object was more than they could imagine, and it immediately reached them before they noticed it.

The gaudy man stiffened. The people in the line thought: It is hopeless already!, with despair reflecting in their eyes.

At the time, when it almost collided into them, the box-like object, creak, creak, creak, half rotating as its rear part shook, and it immediately stopped while raising a dust storm.

People were staring at the stationary object, the magic-driven four-wheeler. Within the confusion of what had happened, the four-wheeler's doors opened. The ones who got off while ignoring and not thinking anything of the surprised people, were of course Hajime and his party. Yue, Shia, and even Tio were ignoring the gazes of the

people. Only Will was saying, Sorry for the commotion!, as he bowed.

However, the people couldn't even hear Will's apology. It could be said they didn't even care about the fact that people were coming out from the never before seen object. Their eyes were glued to the beautiful girls and a woman who "U~n", stretched before them. When Yue, Shia, and Tio moved, "Hou," sighs of admiration of the people entranced by them could be heard.

Hajime was sitting on the four-wheeler's bonnet and said, The distance from here to the entrance, it looks like we need to wait for around an hour, huh~, as he narrowed his eyes. His muscle had stiffened because of the long time

spent inside the car, so he went outside in a carefree way when they reached the gate. Because magic-driven four-wheeler was mobile with the use of Hajime's direct magic manipulation, it was possible to move it without sitting on the driver seat, though the control difficulty was higher.

Hajime released the stiffness in his shoulders as his neck made cracking sounds. Yue got on the bonnet just like Hajime, went behind him, and began to rub his shoulders. Apparently she wanted to massage him. Hajime relaxed his body while smiling.

Maybe because Shia became lonely, she also sat down and drew closer to Hajime's side. When Tio saw

them, she said, "Muh, this one will also participate!," as she emphasized her huge breasts and tried to cling onto Hajime's arm but... she was slapped by Hajime and she fell down. However, there should be no problem as she displayed a very happy expression under Hajime's feet.

"Hajime-san. Is it really okay to drive the four-wheeler until here? At the very least, I think we should hide it..."

"Nn? Honestly, isn't it already too late? We have already rampaged so flashily. In a week, it will spread to even remote regions. Besides, I already had a thought that such a day would eventually come... It's just earlier than what I had

predicted."

"... Nn, there is no more need for such prudence."

Hajime answered Shia's question as he shrugged his shoulders. Even though he planned to put a little effort, so that it will allow them to avoid any trouble, the battle in the Ul town should be spread quickly. So whatever his plan was, it should be useless now. That's why, it was just as Yue had said, he stopped trying to not display his artifacts as much as possible, and decided to no more going about with such cautiousness.

"U~n, so that's it. Well, because there will surely be actions by the Church and the Kingdom, it

certainly is too late, huh. Though it'll be better if we can get support from Aiko-san or Ilwa-san..."

"Well, in the end, those are just insurances. It is at the degree where it will be good if they demonstrate a good effect. To begin with, I have resolved myself to fight anything that might show up no matter what they are. Regardless what happens, I will just mow them down and move forward. That's why it's okay for you, Shia, to no longer act as a slave, you know? Do you want me to remove that collar?"

He thought the troublesome preparations made against the Church and the Kingdom related to Ilwa and Aiko would be something good if they would take effect in the

end. Hajime didn't think much about it. As the topic quickly came to a close, he said it was okay for Shia to stop acting as a slave while poking her collar. Outstretching his hand, he implicitly said it was no longer necessary to hold back to avoid troublesome things.

However Shia who quietly stroked and touched the collar, shook her head to refuse with somewhat blushing cheeks.

"No, it is okay to stay as is. After all, it was the first thing I got from Hajime-san... Besides, it is the proof I am Hajime-san's... and I recently took a liking to it... That's why, it is okay to stay as is."

Shia said such things. Her rabbit

ears moved about from embarrassment. Her appearance of when she was looking down, coupled with her being shy was truly cute. The men in the edge of Hajime's view were pressing their nose as to suppress the dripping blood.

While Shia was still looking down, Hajime held her chin and made her look up. Because of his actions, Shia's face became a deeper shade of red. That followed by the ground under the men's feet also being dyed in red. Hajime took out a crystal with a beautiful hue from the "Treasure Box," and placed it on Shia's collar. To be more precise he used "transmutation" on the crystal.

Shia's collar was to display that she

was Hajime's slave so it was of a boorish fashion. The telepathy stone and the other stones were installed without regards to any design as it was made in unostentatious manner. To begin with, it was made as temporary thing to not attract any trouble inside the town, so he disregarded the design.

However, if Shia liked it and wanted to keep wearing it, just a little, it could be said it was too boorish. Also, compared to the time he gave her the collar, Hajime's feelings towards Shia had become gentler. That's why Hajime thought to make the collar to suit Shia.

As the result, white and blue ornaments were geometrically

installed on the black material and, the fragment of God's Crystal was processed into a small cross that radiated blue light, installed on the front side which resulted in a mysterious-like collar... A choker even more fashionable than the ones sold on earth. There's already no impression left of a dog collar used to restrain.

Hajime showed a satisfied expression towards his workmanship. Shia, who was entranced because of the feeling from Hajime's fingers that sometimes brushed her neck, was startled when Hajime passed a mirror to her. Following that, she readily confirmed the choker on her neck with the mirror. There was certainly a choker with

mysteriously beautiful ornaments. The cross made out of God Crystal was indeed beautiful and suited Shia's eyes.

Shia was poking the cross with her finger and her mouth loosened in a wide smile. Afterwards, she embraced Hajime's arm as a truly happy smile floated across her face while rubbing her forehead on his arm, and continued with her thanks. Incidentally, her rabbit ears were also nestled on Hajime.

While Shia on his shoulder raised an expression of happiness, Yue on his back smiled slightly and stroked Shia's rabbit ears nestled on him. Tio who crept up once again received a slap.

Because of the pink-colored space that appeared out of nowhere, the people who returned from the impact of the unknown object and the appearances of the super beautiful girls, women began to pay attention to Hajime and his party with various feelings. The majority of the women didn't even envy Yue and the others' beauty as they let out warm sighs. On the other side, the men divided into those captivated by Yue and the others, those looking at Hajime with envy and killing intent, and those who licked their lips as they found out the commodity value on Hajime's artifacts and the girls.

However, no one faced Hajime and his party directly even now. The merchants seemed to restrain each

other as they looked for a right timing to speak. Amongst them, was the gaudy man from earlier; he displayed a mortified expression as he compared the two women beside him with Yue and the others, and clicked his tongue. Thus he recklessly approached Hajime and his party.

"Yo, ladies. If it's okay, can— "

"Who do you think you are trying to touch without permission? Huh?"

"Hii!"

The gaudy man casually called out to Yue and the others while ignoring Hajime. If it was only calling them, Hajime's "pressure" wouldn't end up guiding him to

fainting course. But, of all things, the gaudy man was trying to touch Shia's cheek.

Just from one look, the gaudy man was quite a good looking one. Therefore, he must have thought any women would fall for him if he touched and seduced them. However, Shia's gaze was cold and though she thought to deal with him before he touched her, Hajime's arm grabbed the gaudy man's head ahead of her. Moreover it was coupled with a thick killing intent.

The gaudy man immediately ducked his body and leaked a miserable scream. Hajime just ignored the gaudy man's appearance and threw him off towards the highway. The

gaudy man reached the ground in tremendous speed 30 meters away. With his face shaving the ground, he ended up in a pose just like Nagoya's Shachihoko. And after advancing for ten meters more with only his head, he fell and was completely unmoving.

Within cloud of sand, the gaudy man laid on the earth without even twitching. The people who saw were dumbfounded because they just saw a person flew in an impossible orbit, and they turned their gazes to Hajime who created the spectacle. The two women who attended the gaudy man were timidly looking at Hajime, who glared at the surrounding with absolute zero eyes which made them shudder, and they

disappeared somewhere while screaming.

The merchants who tried to restrain each other while saying, "You guys, I won't let you go ahead," from a while ago were now saying, "Please go ahead," as they mutually compromised with each other. Hajime said clearly, Who's next?, while glaring.

Because no one came forward, Hajime smiled in satisfaction, and he looked away from the surrounding people as he lost interest.

"Whoa, Hajime-san was angry for me~ Is this how he expresses his desire to monopolize me? Just one more step until that thing happens,

right!"

"... Shia, do your best."

"Yue-saa~n. Okay. I will work hard~!"

"Hmph, it is of no matter how much thou art is valued~ Master. Isn't it okay to value this one, too? Please throw this one just like that man, please?"

Because Hajime was angry towards the one who tried to touch her, happiness spread through Shia's whole body. Actually, Hajime just couldn't forgive him for trying to touch Shia as though she was his thing. There was no desire to monopolize her, but it was too late to correct her, though it was true

that his action was because he thought Shia as someone important to him.

Incidentally, because Tio who looked at the blown away gaudy man with envying eyes tried to nestle close to him, Hajime still responded with a slap. "Aan!," Tio who collapsed happily after saying with a captivating voice was glared at by Hajime with a truly cold gaze. However, she became even happier as she "Haa, haa," got excited. Hajime let out a deep sigh and said, "This fellow can't be helped anymore," as he gave up thinking about her condition.

Hajime and his party were flirting with such feelings, Will who was outside of this got on and sat inside

the vehicle while looking at the far distance to sort out his feelings. The line from before became noisy again. Hajime turned his gaze and apparently there were guards coming running. They probably saw the quarrel from a while ago. Rather, they might be trying to confirm what had happened because the gaudy man who was planted on the ground was still unmoving.

The three men who rode on horses while wearing simple armor approached Hajime and his party after asking the situation from the nearby merchants. One of the merchant pointed at Hajime's party, then he pointed at the gaudy man. One of the men ordered one of his companions to go towards the

gaudy man. The remaining two men approached Hajime's party who were relaxing (flirting) on the four-wheeler's bonnet. The two men's eyes somewhat sharpened. Not because of duty... but because they envied him.

"Oi, you! What's with this commotion! Beside, what's that black box? Explain yourself!"

Though the man spoke oppressively to Hajime, there's no force at all because he kept sneaking a look towards Yue and the girls. Hajime already expected this development as he looked at the guard and briefly answered.

"This is my artifact. I threw that man away because he tried to put

his hand on her. Can you believe it? How can he suddenly try to hug her? Look, she is frightened by that... Mister Guards, don't tell me you're going to ally with that sex offender? If so, we won't go to Fhuren ever again... how can I be treated as a criminal while you defend the offender... right?"

Blah, blah, Hajime spoke in such manner about vague things as if they were the facts. Shia stuck to Hajime simply because she wanted to be spoiled, and she didn't look frightened if one looked at her objectively. It was a tragedy!, Hajime warped his expression to sincerely appeal. Will on the vehicle said, "What a smooth talker," as he stared at him but got ignored. The surrounding merchants who

became the straight men said, "Rather than trying to embrace, he was thrown before he finished speaking," or "Far from being frightened, it's more like you're flirting," with small voices which were also ignored.

However, it was needless to say what their answer was, as it was obvious which one to believe between the words of a gaudy man and the side of beautiful girls and women. "That guy is the worst," they easily believed him without examining it further.

Then at that time, one of the guards inclined his head when he saw Hajime's party then he said, "Ah," as if he recalled something then he whispered to the other guard to

confirm it. Unknown to what was said, the other guard said in a similar manner, "Now that you mention it," as he thoroughly examined at Hajime's party.

"... You, are you Hajime, Yue, and Shia?"

"Nn? Ah, that's certainly so..."

"I see. Then, are you returning from the guild's branch head's request?"

"Ah, though it is so... did a notification come from by the branch head?"

The guard nodded in consent towards Hajime's expectations. The guard immediately told them to pass the gate without waiting for

their turn. They moved using four-wheeler and followed by the guards. The people in the lines were curious about what happened as they narrowed their eyes to watch them move, and Hajime's party once again set their feet in Fhuren.

* * *

Hajime's party were currently inside the reception room of the adventurer guild.

They were served with high-grade teas along with the cakes, and they unreservedly drank it while they waited for five minutes. The one who kicked the door open and jumped inside was Ilwa Chang who

requested Hajime's party to rescue Will.

"Will! Are you safe!? Do you have any injury!?"

Casting aside his calm atmosphere from the past meeting, he didn't even greet them as Ilwa was confirming Will's safety when he saw him. It might be because he was very worried about him.

"Ilwa-san... I am sorry. It was because I said something unreasonable that you were troubled ..."

"... What are you saying... It was me who introduced you to a dangerous commission... You really are safe... I can't face Greille and Sarria if

something happened to Will... They are also quite worried about you. It'll be better if you quickly show your face to relieve them. I have reported to them about your safety. That information came to Fhuren several days ago..."

"Father and Mama are... I understand. I will immediately go to meet them."

Ilwa told Will where his parent stayed and nodded, telling him to go. Will once again expressed his gratitude to Ilwa as he bowed, then he formally greeted Hajime's party before he, as promised, went outside the room. For Hajime, he was glad it went well, but he seemed dissatisfied because he didn't make proper thanks.

After Will went outside, Ilwa formally looked at Hajime. Ilwa was smiling with a calm expression, then he deeply bowed to Hajime.

"Hajime-kun, thank you very much for this. I never thought you'd really bring Will back alive. I can't express my gratitude with words."

"Well, Will survived because he has good luck."

"Fufu, is that so? There is certainly that... but isn't it the truth that you protected him from tens of thousands of demonic beasts? Goddess's Sword-sama?"

While he smiled radiantly, Ilwa called Hajime with his nickname

from the previous battle against the large crowd of demonic beasts. Hajime's cheeks cramped. Apparently, the guild's branch head owned the method to transmit the information faster than Hajime's movement.

"... That information spread quite fast, huh."

"It is because of the guild executives. There's also the artifact for long-distance report. And I also have my subordinate to follow you. Though I said that, he seemed to have been always left behind to wander around because of those unexpected movement type artifacts... It was the first time I heard him complaining. After all, he held the greatest ability to gather

information."

Ilwa said as he smiled wryly. It seemed he hired an observer since the beginning. It was a natural measure as a guild's branch head, so Hajime wasn't angry. Rather, he quite sympathized with the branch head's direct subordinate when he thought of him always rushing around because of him.

"Even so, the situation was truly a serious one. I never thought the accident in the Northern Mountain Ranges area to be a sign for such great disaster... It was truly a good thing I asked you for that request. I'm also interested in the power that could annihilate tens of thousands of demonic beasts... Can you let me hear it? Just what on

earth had happened?"

"Ah, I don't mind. But, before that I ask you for Yue and Shia's status plates... and about Tio—"

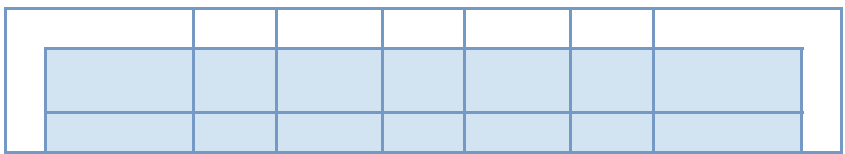
"Hmm, if those two get one, then please this one too."

"... Is what she said."

"Hmm, certainly, and the credibility will increase if I can see what's in the plate... okay."

After saying so, Ilwa called the staff and three brand new status plates were brought in.

As the result, Yue and the girls' statuses were as followed.



Age	900 Years Old
Gender	Female
Class	Priestess (Miko)
Height	5'3"
Weight	106 lbs
Physique	Slender
Magic Resistance	5,900

Skills

- Automatic Regeneration
  - Pain Control
- All Elements Aptitude
- Compound Magic
- Magic Manipulation
  - Magic Emission
  - Magic Compression
  - Remote Control
  - Efficiency Rise
  - Magic Absorption
- Composition by Imagination
  - Rise in Ability to Imagine
  - Simultaneous Compound of More than Two Magic
  - Delayed Invocation
- Blood Conversion
  - Body Strengthening
  - Magic Conversion

- Vitality Conversion
- Magic Strengthening
- Blood Pact

- High Speed Magic Recovery
- Creation Magic
- Gravity Magic

Age	80 Years Old
Gender	Female
Race	Elf
Class	Mage
Grade	6
Vitality	Max: 6,120
Mana	Max: 6,120
Strength	1,020
Agility	1,020
Magic	1,020
Resistance	1,020

Skills

- Foresight
  - Automatic Invocation
  - Assumption of Future
- Magic Manipulation
  - Body Strengthening
  - Part Strengthening
  - Rise in Conversion Efficiency 2
  - Concentrated Strengthening
- Gravity Magic

Age	80 Years Old
Gender	Female
Race	Elf
Class	Mage
Grade	6
Vitality	Max: 6,120
Mana	Max: 6,120
Strength	1,020
Agility	1,020
Magic	1,020
Resistance	1,020

Race	Human
Class	Guardian
Strength	3,780
Agility	3,780
Magic	4,200
Stamina	4,620
Physical Resistance	3,360
Magic Resistance	3,360

Skills

- Dragon Form
  - Dragon Scales Hardening
  - Rise in Magic Efficiency
  - Rise in Physical Strength
  - Roar
  - Wind Clad
  - Pain Conversion
- Magic Manipulation
  - Magic Emission
  - Magic Compression
- Fire Element Aptitude
  - Decrease in Magic Consumption
  - Effect Raised
  - Duration Raised
- Wind Element Aptitude
  - Decrease in Magic Consumption
  - Effect Raised

- Duration Raised
- Compound Magic

Though their statuses didn't reach Hajime, theirs were at the level where not even a few of the summoned cheat group could become. It was at the level that couldn't even be reached by the Hero when he uses Limit Break.

As expected, Ilwa was speechless as he became slack-jawed. It couldn't be helped. Yue and Tio owned the skills such as "Blood Conversion" and "Dragon Form" which were peculiar skill for the races assumed to have been perished, and their statuses were too abnormal. Shia also completely ignored her tribe's common sense. It was strange to not be surprised by them.

"My, my... I had thought there must be something, but something like these are..."

Drenched in cold sweat, Ilwa's usual smile cramped when he saw the statuses, and Hajime uncaringly said in agreement. He listened to it normally, even if the silly contents seemed to be fixed through their lives, he could not help believing it because the numerical values and skills he just seen were proven by the status plates. When Ilwa finished hearing all of his stories, he sat deeply on the sofa with a weary look that made him seemed like he suddenly aged for at least ten years.

"... Indeed, you were able to catch

Catherine-sensei's attention. Though I had expected Hajime-kun alone was someone from different world... the actual things are far more oblique, huh..."

"... Then, branch head-san. What will you do? Are you going to hand us over to the church as dangerous elements?"

Ilwa corrected his seating as he looked at Hajime as if criticizing his question.

"That joke is too cruel. You think I can do that? To become your enemy is an impossible choice as an executive of the guild... Also, I don't want you to take lightly of me. You are my benefactors. It is not something I can forget for the rest

of my life."

"... I see. Then that's good." Hajime shrugged his shoulders and used his gaze to express his sorry and gratitude.

"I have even thought, at the very least, to become your support just as promised, as guild executive and as my own self. Well, at least I will show you that now. For now, I don't think the people from above will do anything to you as their discussion became complicated. At least I will make all of you "Gold"-rank adventurers to make it easier to support you. Normally there would be various troublesome procedures to become "Gold"... I will somehow do it later. After all, there are Catherine-sensei and my

recommendation along with your fame as "Goddess's Sword"."

Ilwa shown a lavish hospitality as he prepared a letter with his family crest, so they could use the VIP room of the inn directly operated by the guild while they were in Fhuren. If anything, though there was his gratitude for the recent event, he seemed to also want to create a friendly relationship with Hajime's party. He spoke of everything in seriousness without having any reason to hide anything.

Afterwards, when they separated from Ilwa, Hajime's party went to relax in the VIP room at the hotel directly managed by the guild in Fhuren's Central Ward. On their way, they met Will's parents, Count

Greille Greta and Saria Greta, who came to greet them accompanied by Will. They were different from the nobles he had saw in the Royal Palace, since they seemed to be fairly logical people. He was convinced that Will's goodness came from his parents.

Count Greille wanted to thank them by inviting them to his house by giving them money and goods, but he left with a message saying he'd help them if they were in trouble because Hajime firmly refused the rewards.

A wide living room: there were four other rooms beside the room, and all of them were equipped with canopied beds overseeing the Sightseeing Ward from the terrace.

Hajime was lying down on the super big sofa in the living room as he sighed in relaxation.

Yue lifted Hajime's head and rested it on her lap as usual. Shia was sitting at his feet, while Tio was looking around the room in curiosity.

"Let's rest for today. We will do things such as shopping and buying the food tomorrow."

Hajime narrowed his eyes as he felt pleasant from Yue's hand that was brushing his hair, and he said the schedule for tomorrow. Shia was waiting for it. She timidly shook Hajime's reclining body.

"That's~, Hajime-san. The

promise..."

"... I remember. Shall I take you to the Sightseeing Ward..."

As the reward for Shia's hard work, Hajime promised to go on a date with her for a day. Shia was looking at Hajime with expectant eyes. Hajime was hesitating because it was necessary to procure the food, but Yue concluded his hesitation. Her soft hands were placed on Hajime's cheeks and she narrowed her eyes gently.

"... Tio and I will be the one shopping. So go with Shia, okay?"

"... Is it okay?"

"Nn... in exchange..."

"In exchange?"

Yue looked at Hajime and her best friend Shia, who was truly expecting the promise, with a gentle gaze as she exuded a big-sister-like atmosphere, and she urged Hajime. Hajime tried to confirm the continuation of her words with a somewhat complex look, and Yue's gentle expression changed into bewitching one as she licked her lip. She followed it by drawing her face closer to Hajime's ear and...

"... I want you to love me a lot tonight." She said.

Hajime covered his face with his hand and said, "... Nn," a Yue-like answer. That's all they needed.

Though he was confident of being able to win against the guardian in the depth of the dungeon, perhaps for his whole life he wouldn't be able to defeat Yue or so Hajime thought.

"... Before I notice, they naturally began to make the world of their own... not surprising from Yue-san."

"Hmm, even so, this one feel the undiscouraged Shia is considerably strong. Well, this one has no problem because this one is satisfied as long as Master bullies this one... Shia has quite the obstacle~"

While Shia directed a, "As expected of Master," gaze towards Yue with respectful eyes, and Tio sent an

interested gaze towards Shia and Yue's relationship where no envy could be felt. Afterwards, when Hajime managed to regain his senses that flew outside because of Yue's surprise attack, the four of them chatted, and the day grew into the night.

* * *

Extra

Midnight that day.

As the moon approached the zenith... two shadows stealthily moved to the terrace in the top floor of the inn directly managed by adventurer guild. The two dressed

in black just like assassins, slowly killed their presences as they approached a certain room's window, and they silently look inside.

The things inside that room were...

"Fuwah! Please look at that, Tio-san! That intense... Yue-san will break you know."

"WHOOAA! Master is so intense! H-However, Shia. Yue's expression... is certainly bad! Even though this one is also a woman, this one can feel something strange..."

"Ack, it is definitely an enchanting expression that cannot be resisted! She looks so happy~, I'm so jealous~."

"Mmm~, though this one is satisfied as long as Master bully this one... that kind of thing isn't bad, too~."

... After this, Hajime who noticed their presences, needless to say, gave the two peeping toms a harsh punishment.

* * *

Some information about the statuses:
Blood Pact – Drastic increase in status of the person whom is chosen to suck blood from.

Composition by Imagination – Magic array can be completely

made just by imagining it.

Rise in Conversion Efficiency 3 – 1 unit of magic will be converted into 3 unit of physical strength.

Dragon Scales Hardening – Dragon scales can be further hardened using magic. It is possible to further increase the basic status using Dragon Form.

Author's Note: The statuses are still tentative. There's possibility of adjustment depending on the future development.

Chapter 67: Hajime becomes a Papa I

* * *

"Fufufufu~n, fufufu~n! What a fine weather~ It's a splendid weather for a date~."

In Fhuren's main street, the rabbit eared girl, Shia, was cheerfully walking while skipping. Her clothing was different from her usual durable adventurer style clothes – it was a lovely milk-white one-piece dress. With narrowed collar, there was a big opening in the cleavage and Shia's rich breasts were *boing, boing!*, swaying as she

walked. A slender, black belt was attached on her waist. Her rich hip-line and the indescribably enchanting curve were clearly displayed. Slender, tight, and beautiful legs were extended from the skirt 15 cm above her knees, and the gazes of men were gathered on the pair of bouncing hills.

But the most attractive thing about her was her atmosphere and her smile. With blushing cheeks, I am happy, so it cannot be helped!, was overflowing from her without any effort to conceal it. About her being a demi-human or how she wore a slave's collar-like thing, could be said as something trivial as the surrounding people fell for her. There were also elderlies who smiled as if they saw something

pleasant.

Behind the ecstatic Shia, was Hajime who walked on with a wry smile. Maybe because she was so elated, Shia repeatedly walked a little ahead, and then turned around with a smile as she waited for Hajime to catch up. Just like the surrounding people, Hajime inadvertently smiled.

"Your spirit is too high, Shia. You will fall down if you don't look in front, you know?"

"Fufufu, I won't make such blunder~, after all I have been trained by Yue-sa—!?"

Because of Hajime's warning, Shia turned around again as she replied

to him, she almost fell down. Hajime promptly held her waist to support her. Though there wouldn't be any problem considering Shia's physical strength, she wore a short skirt today. He would not let the men who pant as they looked at Shia to become lucky perverts.

"I-I am sorry."

"See, now that you understand, walk right beside me."

As she shrunk her body because of the embarrassment from being held by the waist, Shia demurely tugged Hajime's sleeve, and this time she began to walk in slower pace next to him. Because of how lovely she looked with blushing cheeks, most of the surrounding men seemed to

have been knocked out. Some of them were because of the fists from the lovers by their side.

Hajime and Shia kept collecting the surrounding gazes, and they finally entered the Sightseeing Ward.
There were various facilities inside the Sightseeing Ward. For example were theatres and street performers avenue, circus, music halls, aquarium, arena, game studio, observatory, colorful flower garden along with huge maze of flowers, and even beautiful buildings along with the plazas.

"Hajime-san, Hajime-san! Let's go to Meerstat first! I have never seen a marine creature before!"

With a guide book in hand, Shia's

rabbit ears moved as though to express, "Let's go! Let's go!" She seemed to have never seen any marine creature because she lived in «Haltina Sea of Trees», so she wanted to go to Meerstat, a famous aquarium in Fhuren's Sightseeing Ward.

Incidentally, she was used to seeing freshwater fishes because there were lakes and rivers in the Sea of Trees. However, she felt they weren't the same even though the marine creatures were shaped similar to those fishes. Though Hajime thought them as only fish... he didn't say anything since he read the mood. Hajime was going to be nice to Shia today.

"Hee~, for marine creatures to be

inland... that's the point. Though the management, maintenance, and transportation must be troublesome..."

Though Hajime wasn't interested at all, he didn't reject it since he didn't have any reason to refuse her. Furthermore, Shia was happily smiling as she pulled Hajime's hand.

On the way in street performers avenue, their eyes were caught by people who did acrobatic as they challenged the human's limit, when they finally reached the big facility of Meerstat. Maybe as to represent the sea, the whole building was painted in blue and there were crowds of people in there.

The interior was extremely similar to the aquarium in the Earth. However, maybe because they didn't have the technology to make transparent water tanks that could endure the water pressure like the ones on Earth, bulky glass tiles were buried in the fence made of crystal-like metal, and it only somewhat visible.

However, Shia didn't mind it. Her eyes sparkled from seeing the marine creatures for the first time, and she spoke to Hajime while pointing her finger. Right next to them, was a little girl with her family who also pointing with sparkling eyes. Unexpectedly, his gaze met the father-like person's gaze and because Hajime noticed he looked at him with warm gaze.

Hajime, who felt awkward, took Shia's hand and moved elsewhere. Shia was surprised by Hajime's action but she was happy he took her hand, and needless to say she returned his grasp while blushing.

After this and that, they enjoyed the aquarium for one hour, when Shia suddenly became wide-eyed when she looked at a certain water tank again, and began to stare at it.

Inside was... a Seaman. It was human-faced fish very similar to the one from the game Hajime knew.

"... Wh-why is he here..."

Shia backed away and trembled. Maybe because the Seaman noticed

Shia, it turned to watch her with the same lazy expression from inside the water tank. The tension raised for some unknown reason. Because of two people, Hajime looked at the explanation placed beside the water tank.

According to it, this Seaman was an aquatic demonic beast, and it capable of using peculiar magic called "Telepathy." It seemed to be able to speak fluently though it rarely spoke, and he confirmed from the description that it was famous as a demonic beast one could converse with.

However, even if it was possible to talk to, it would only answer with an unmotivated voice as though the talk was very troublesome for it.

Also, caution was necessary because the person it spoke to would become depressed as a side effect. It like alcohol and becomes talkative as it drinks. However, it wouldn't be called a conversation as a person would one-sidedly continued to preach to the conversation partner... Incidentally, it was named Lehman.

Since Hajime didn't know whether Shia was simply staring or if she was having at argument with it. However, when sweat lines started to appear on her face and she didn't reply to him, or when he talked to it in the normal way, he used "Telepathy" instead.

"You, can you really use telepathy? Can you really converse? Can you

understand my words?"

Because of the sudden telepathy, Lehman's eyes twitched for a moment in response. It followed by shifting its gaze from Shia to slowly looking at Hajime. Shia whose expression expressed, Somehow I won!, was ignored.

"... Tch, this should be our first meeting. First, introduce yourself. That is how you show your manner. Good grief, this is why the young people these days..."

He was taught about manners by the fish with a face of an old man. He regretted his mistake. With cramped cheeks, Hajime tried to talk again.

"... My bad. I am Hajime. Looks like you really can converse. Just what is Lehman?"

"... You know. Just what is human? How can you answer that? That's why, how would I know the answer. Well, I only can say I am me. No more no less. Also, call me by my name or whatever you like."

Hajime had thought, "Just how does it think..." But somehow it spoke about common sense, moreover it was rather cool. That was completely unexpected. Wasn't it written that it was unmotivated?, he wanted to complaint to the aquarium's staff. Hajime was slightly looking at the distance in escapism, but this time a question came from the Lehman.

"I also want to ask one thing. You, why can you use telepathy? There's no sign of the use of human's magic... It was as if you are the same as me."

It was nothing but a natural question. After all, a human was using the peculiar magic, "Telepathy." It was curious as to why he was able to casually use just like it. It might be the cause of why the rarely talkative Lehman was responding to Hajime's conversation. Hajime explained he was able to use it by eating the demonic beast that was capable of using telepathy.

"... That's a lot of hardships for someone so young. Okay, ask me

anything you want. This old man will answer anything in my knowledge."

He was sympathized. Apparently, it thought he was so poor that there was no choice other than eating the demonic beast. When it saw his current appearance and he was wearing good clothing, it said as it sniffled, "Looks like you've worked so hard, good boy! It make me want to cry."

Hajime didn't correct it because it was the true he had some hard times. However, for him to be sympathized by a fish... it was somewhat depressing. He somehow managed to set it aside and asked Lehman various things. For examples, Does a demonic beast

have a clear will?, How were the demonic beasts born?, Are there any other demonic beasts people can communicate with?, ... Lehman answered that most demonic beasts didn't have clear will. It didn't know any other demonic beasts that could understand human language other than its species. Moreover, it didn't know how the demonic beasts were born.

Moderate amount of time had passed as he asked a lot of things, and they began to gather attention because it was a surreal spectacle for the onlookers to see a young man and a fish with a face of an old man staring at each other. Shia, who began to feel restless, was tugging Hajime's sleeve, so Hajime rounded up the conversation.

Even though his conversation with Lehman was somewhat interesting, today was decided for him to go out and spend it with Shia. He would not neglect his promise. Lehman also said, "Oops, looks like I have obstructed your date," as it rounded up the conversation by reading the mood. By the way, they got along so well that they called each other with "Leh-san" and "Ha-boy." Hajime could see the "nobleness" inside the Lehman.

In the end, Hajime asked why Lehman was in such a place. The answer was...

"Nn? Just as I said before, I was traveling freely... but the underground water which I was

swimming through suddenly sprouted outside and I was thrown away... Before I knew, I was in a grassy place beside a spring. Though I won't die even without water, I cannot move without it. When I tried to ask for help using telepathy... Well, I was brought here."

Immediately, a line of sweat flowed from Hajime's forehead. It was obviously the time when they got out from the Great Dungeon of Raisen. Apparently, Lehman was involved and was launched together with them at that spring. Though the real culprit was the idiot Miledi, there was no change that they got it involved.

Hajime, ahem, cleared his throat,

then asked the Lehman.

"Ah~, Leh-san. That is, what can I say. Do you want to get out of here?"

"? That's, of course. For I am more suited for traveling freely. It is the best for a living thing to live the natural way. Rather than inside such a cage, I prefer to die in the ocean."

Lehman used lot of connotations in those words. Therefore, Hajime who liked the Lehman decided to help it because he was also at fault.

"Leh-san. If so, I will bring you to a nearby river. Apparently, your situation was caused by my party. Since I will bring you out in few

minutes, please believe in me and I will quietly transport you."

"Ha-boy... Heh, though you are young, to have such way of thinking... I don't know what will you do, but no one should be able to match your power. I will believe in Ha-boy and wait."

Hajime and Lehman exchanged manly smiles. As if understanding the their expressions, Shia's cheeks cramped as she said, "Huh? Don't tell me another rival?" Hajime pulled Shia's hand as he turned on his heel from the place. Although the reason was unknown, the Lehman used "Telepathy" to Shia who followed Hajime.

"Little miss, I am sorry to surprise

you back then. Don't let go of the hand tied to Ha-boy's."

"Heh? Heh? Umm, well, there is no need to worry about that! I have my first kiss with Hajime-san thanks to that! Also, I definitely won't let it go!"

Though she didn't understand, Shia firmly answered. Lehman displayed a satisfied smile as it looked at Shia. "How meddlesome," Hajime prayed for his new friend's good luck from now on as he left the Meerstat aquarium with a wry smile.

After a few minutes, a claw crane broke through into the lower part of the aquarium. It crushed Lehman's water tank, used the arm to catch the Lehman that came out

along the water splendidly, defeated the staff members who were after them (there were no injury). Furthermore, it destroyed a wall to get out and disappeared far into the sky; these kinds of things happened. There were commotions about whether it was a new kind of demonic beast or the Lehman's hidden ability... but that was something trivial.

* * *

At that time, on the other side...

Yue and Tio were shopping inside the Commercial Ward. Even so, because there were already a large amount of necessary thing inside

Hajime's "Treasure Box," they could only replenish a small amount of the things they consume in their travel. Therefore, rather than shopping for food, the two were just indifferently wandering around the various shops in the Commercial Ward.

"Hmm. Even so, Yue. Art thou really okay about that?"
" ? ... About Shia?"

"Mm-hmm. It is possible that various things had progressed right now, thou know? Have thou thought of that?"

Tio was questioning Yue, who was judging the things exhibited in the boutique. Her tone was filled with some curiosity. Is it okay to be this

calm? Isn't it possible she passed thou? Tio was interested in the mysterious relationship of the three. Because they would be traveling companions from now on, she wanted to converse without reserve for once.

On the other hand, Yue wasn't was shaken. She simply shrugged her shoulders and looked at Tio. There was no sense of crisis at all.

"... I am happy if it happens."

"Happy? Though the man thou love becomes intimate with another woman?"

"... It is not another woman. It's Shia."

When Tio inclined her head, Yue continued to talk as she walked around the shop.

"... In the beginning, when she tried to get close to Hajime... I was annoyed because she clearly had another intent... However, I understand now."

"Understand?"

"... Nn, that girl always did her best. Always used her utmost effort. All for the sake of her important things and the things she loves. She is straightforward for the better or worse."

"Hmm. This one understands just by seeing her... Is that why thou have such a bond?"

Tio smiled when Shia, someone she was associated with only for a short time, floated in her head. She naturally smile as she thought of the moodmaker girl, whose smile didn't disappear even with the hardship she has experienced for being a demi-human. Moreover, although there were a lot of disappointing things about her because she was still young, Tio liked Shia. However, she thought it was a weak reason to allow her to go on a date with Yue's lover. In the end, she wanted to confirm another reason than Yue just liking Shia.

"... The other is."

"Other? What doest thou mean by other?"

Because of Tio's questioning face, Yue began to smile as she answered.

"... Shia also likes me. At least as much as Hajime. They are the same even though they have different meaning... Isn't that cute?"

"... Indeed... Master and Yue, ye both are necessary for that child... There are only few people who could be fond of the one who treated them unkindly. That might be her virtue. Hmm, this one thought this one understood what Yue thinks of Shia... But what about Master? Have thou thought Master might be captivated by her? Don't thou understand that child's charm?"

Yue shrugged her shoulders as if those things were ridiculous, and this time she displayed a bewitching smile. Eyes narrowed, cheeks blushed, she licked her lips. Her seductiveness overflowed from her body though she was small just like a little girl. Men and women who were walking around them stopped to look at her. In the following moments, accidents appeared here and there; pedestrians collided because they walked while their eyes were still nailed on Yue. Overflowing sensuality came from Tio's voluptuous body, but beside her was blurred. Tio recalled the time when she peeped at Yue last night and she became charmed by her.

"... I want to increase Hajime's

"important ones." However,... only I am "special"... if you think you can take him, then try it. No matter the time, the place, or who it is... I will be the winner."

"Can you do it?", Yue implied the declaration with a smile, and Tio backed away from the force she felt coming from the gap of Yue's usual expressionlessness. Because she backed away unconsciously, Tio revealed a surprised expression and she raised both hands to show she gave up with a bitter smile.

"Well... this one never thinks of starting a fight. This one feel it is enough as long as Master abuse this one."

"... A pervert."

Yue looked at Tio with an amazed expression while the person in question only laughed cheerfully. Thus, Yue, who had guessed Tio was trying to find a way to relate with them when she purposely began such talk, could only sighed because the Ryuujin race she longed for turned out to be a pervert. However, she smiled wryly as they seemed to be able to get along.

As such, the distance between Yue and Tio slightly shortened as they went out of the boutique and,

BOOM!!

"Guwa!!"
"Ahhh!!"

The wall of a nearby building was immediately destroyed, and the screams of two men could be heard from there as they appeared with their faces planted on the ground. In addition, several men were also blown away from the window of the same building just like pinballs as they screamed. Sounds of destruction resounded from inside the building, and with that, the wall cracked and collapsed as though the building received a severe earthquake.

With several tens of men convulsing with their limbs bent in strange directions as they lined up on the street. The building that could no longer endure the damage finally collapsed with a tremendous

roar.

Among the onlooker who had scattered in a distance, Yue and Tio perceived familiar voices and presences. Thus, they stayed in their places and they looked inside the scattered dust with amazed expressions.

"Ah, ah, these are the two's presences, as expected..."

"Huh? Aren't those Yue-san and Tio-san? Why are you here?"

"... That's our line... You are overdoing it for a date."

"Seriously~, well? Oh Master, just what kind of trouble hath art thou gotten involved in this time?"

Just as Yue and Tio perceived, what appeared from the scattered dust were Hajime and Shia. The two should be on a date now, but they approached Yue and Tio with familiar weapons on their arms. She was wearing adorable clothing, so the appearance of Shia who shouldered a brutal weapon was truly a surreal one.

"Ahaha, even I never thought it will turn into such a date... It just that the development... we destroyed a facility related to an organization that trades people..."

"... What kind of development resulted in fighting an underground organization?"

Yue displayed an amazed expression as Shia let out dry laugh. Tio was looking at Hajime asking for an explanation.

"Well, we are rather short handed for now. So can you help me after I explain the situation?"

As he put Donner into the holster, Hajime threw away the men who tumbled on the ground like pebbles as they obstructed his way. While looking at the piled up men with a leer, Hajime began to explain the situation to Yue and Tio.

Chapter 68: Hajime becomes a Papa II

* * *

After they left the Meerstat aquarium and ate their lunches, Hajime and Shia strolled around the maze of flower beds and street performers' avenue. In Shia's arm, there were many wrappers of food item bought from various stalls, and she was currently occupied with the vanilla-like ice cream.

"You ate a lot... Were they that good?"

"Nom... Yes! They are really

delicious. As expected of Fhuren, even the level of their food stalls are high."

"...You'll grow fat if you eat too much."

"...Hajime-san, those are words that shouldn't be said to a woman."

Because of Hajime's words, the hand she was using to eat stopped for a moment as she made excuses under her breath, "I will exercise later... I will also eat less tomorrow...," and Shia continued to enjoy the sweets from the stalls. While Hajime walked beside Shia with a wry smile, his expression changed suddenly to a dubious one. He turned around and looked down.

Shia noticed him and asked while inclining her head, "Nn? Is something wrong, Hajime-san?"

"Nn—? The sign perception perceived a worrying presence..."

"Did you use the sign perception?"

"I always activate it as precaution."

"U~n? But, are you that worried? And even if you say a presence..."

Shia looked at the surrounding, she tilted her head and said, "There are a lot of people around, you know?"

"No, that's not what I mean... What I perceived was from below?"

"Below?... you mean the drainage?

Umm, wouldn't it be the maintenance staff?"

"If so, then I wouldn't be worried about it. It's a small and weak presence... Maybe it's a child? Moreover, a weakened one."

"Eh!? Th-That's bad! I-It is possible the child fell into a hole and drowned! Hajime-san! Let's chase after it! Show me the way!"

The moment Shia heard Hajime's explanation, she immediately ran. Although Aiko's words about his "lonely way of life" had been etched in his heart, but the truth was that Shia moved faster than him, which made him smile wryly. Shia's brightness and straightforwardness seems to have been a good

influence on Hajime.

Shia and Hajime chased after the moving presence underground with a moderate speed. From the town's structure, they expected the drainage to flow along the street. When they immediately passed by the presence, he pressed his hand on the ground to transmute it. Red sparks kindled, and a hole connected to the underground immediately opened.

Hajime and Shia unhesitatingly jumped into the hole. He then used "Aerodynamic," held onto Shia right before they fell into the drainage that released the bad smell, and they landed on the passage on both side of the waterways.

"Hajime-san, I can also feel the presence. I will jump and pull it!"

"No, it is okay."

Hajime stopped Shia, who tried to jump without minding that her clothing would be dirtied, by holding her neck root. He then once again pressed his hand on the ground and used transmutation. A lattice was created along with red sparks in the waterway. Because the lattice was set diagonally up, the child being swept away moved towards them and stopped when caught by the lattice. Hajime operated the gimmick in his left arm. His arm extended to catch the child, and he pulled it to the passage.

"This child..."

"Well, this child is still breathing... Let's get out of here for now, the smell is very bad here."

Seeing child they saved, Shia widened her eyes in surprise. Hajime also had knowledge of the child's appearance, so he was surprised in his mind. However, their current location wasn't good physically and mentally, so they moved to another location.

Somehow, since it didn't seem to be an accident where a child fell into the waterways and drowned, Hajime who was hesitating to return to the street from the hole he created earlier, used transmutation close to the hole and opened another hole

in the drainage passage after recalling the arrangement of the buildings on the surface. Thus, while holding the small child wrapped in a blanket he took out from the "Treasure Box," they began to move.

Red sparks suddenly appeared in a certain back alley, and a hole opened on the ground. The ones who jumped out from there were Shia and Hajime carrying a small child with him. Hajime used transmutation to close the hole and he shifted his gaze back towards the child he was holding.

From the child's stature, he or she should be around 3 or 4 years old. With long emerald green hair, and though the child was dirty, it didn't

change her lovely features. The child should be a girl. However, the most eye catching thing were her ears. Unlike humans, her ears were fan-like fins. In addition, what peeked out from inside the blanket were maple-like small hand, and a folded thin film attached in between her fingers.

"Looks like this child came from Sea-dweller tribe... Just why is she in such a place..."

"Well, I am certain it wasn't for a good reason."

The Sea-dweller tribe was a tribe with considerably special position even among the demi-human races. They lived in «Seaside Town of Elisen», located offshore

of the sea right beside «Great Dessert Guryuu-en» in the west of the continent. Using their special characteristic, the tribe caught 80% of the marine products that appeared in the market in this continent. It was the reason why they were publicly protected by Herrlicht Kingdom even though they are demi-human race. In the end, it was all about the money, since they were protected because they could be used even while the discrimination continued.

That was why it was unbelievable for a person of the Sea-dweller's tribe, who were being protected, to be washed away in the drainage of an inland's big city, even more so when it was a child. The smell of crime was intense.

As they were thinking of the girl from the Sea-dweller's tribe, her nose twitched, her eyes opened and blinked. Then, the big, circle pupils, began to stare at Hajime. Hajime, whose gaze somehow met hers, didn't look away and stared back. With the unknown tension floating around, Shia, who seem to know something, approached her with an amazed expression. Suddenly, the stomach of the girl from the Sea-dweller's tribe let out a cute growling sound. With her nose twitching again, she moved her gaze from Hajime and her eyes locked on the wrappers Shia bought from the stalls.

'These?' Shia thought as she tilted her head and moved the wrappings

with skewered meats inside from right to left. Just like magnet, the girl's gaze followed. Apparently, she was quite hungry. Shia tried to take out the skewered meats from the wrapping while Hajime began talking to the girl while transmuting.

"Okay, what's your name?"

The girl whose eyes were captivated by the skewered meats Shia was holding was surprised and ducked her body when bright sparks suddenly appeared from the ground followed by a floating square box. Hajime asked her name once more, and after her gazed wandered around for a while, she said her name in small whisper.

"... Myuu."

"I see. I am Hajime, and this is Shia. Then, Myuu, if you want to eat the skewered meat, first wash off the dirt from your body."

Hajime took out clean water he saved inside the "Treasure Box," and filled the bathtub he just transmuted. In addition, he adjusted the water temperature using a flame ore and the improvised bath was completed. It is very dangerous eat a meal with a body dirtied by drainage. Because she seemed to have drank the drainage water, it was necessary to take detoxifying and bactericidal medicines (marketed commodities).

Not long afterwards, Myuu

responded by taking off the blanket along with her clothes dirtied by the drainage, and entered the bathtub. "Ekk!," though her body was cringed as though she was frightened, she then narrowed her eyes when her body gradually got warmed up. Hajime handed the medicines and towel to Shia, passed the soap to Myuu, and he went out to the back alley to buy Myuu some clothing.

When Hajime returned from the back alley after purchasing Myuu's clothing, Myuu had already gotten out of the bathtub and was currently being held by Shia, wrapped in a new blanket. While Shia was holding on to Myuu, she said "Ahh," as she peeled off pieces of meat and fed it to Myuu's small mouth – chewing to the utmost.

Her dirtied hair regained its emerald green shine, and the reflected light created a halo around her head.

"Ah, Hajime-san. Welcome back. Although it's amateur judgement, there's no problem with Myuu-chan."

When Shia noticed Hajime's return, she reported while continuously stroking Myuu's moist hair. Maybe because she also noticed Hajime's presence, she began to stare at him again while still chewing. She might be judging whether he was a good or bad person.

Hajime responded to Shia's words by nodding, and took out the clothes he bought. It was a milk-

white, feminine one piece dress, one that looked similar to the one Shia was wearing. In addition, there was a gladiator sandal-like footwear, and underwear. Because the items were for children, he was worried about the shop clerk's eyes when he bought them.

Hajime walked towards Myuu, took off the blanket, and put on the one piece dress over her head, quickly followed by the underwear. He knelt before Myuu and put the sandals on each foot. In addition, he took out an artifact that lets out warm air – in other words, a blow dryer – from the "Treasure Box," and dried Myuu's moist hair. Myuu stood completely still but although she continued to stare at Hajime, she gradually narrowed her eyes when

pleasant warm air blew.

"... What can I say. Looks like Hajime-san is good at taking care of others."

"What are you saying out of the blue..."

Although Hajime frowned at Shia's words while he was still drying Myuu's hair, his appearance was the evidence he was good at taking care of others, so Shia's cheeks loosened with a smile. Hajime somehow felt embarrassed and averted the topic.

"Well, about what to do..."

"About what we should do with Myuu-chan, right..."

Because she understood the two were talking about her, Myuu alternately looked up between Shia and Hajime.

For now, Hajime and Shia decided to hear Myuu's situation.

As a result, the content Myuu spoke of with her faltering voice was almost exactly what Hajime had expected. On a certain day, she got lost while she was swimming with her mother in a nearby coastline, and while she was wandering around, she was suddenly captured by a man from the human race.

After many harsh days had passed, she was transported quite a distance to Fhuren, and was then

put in a dim, prison-like place. Inside the place, there were a lot of children of the human race. After she spent who knows how many days inside, several children who were with her were taken out on a daily basis but never returned. A slightly older boy said they were going to be displayed to guests and priced.

When it was finally Myuu's turn, there was by chance a drainage maintenance that day, so the hole leading to the underground waterway was open. Myuu, who heard the nostalgic sound of the water, immediately jumped inside. Usually, there was nothing a 3 or 4 year old could do because the hurdle was too high, but fortunately, she wasn't handcuffed.

Myuu swam with all her might while enduring the unpleasantness of the filthy sewage. Though she was young, she was a child of the Sea-dweller's tribe. The men could do nothing but run on the passageway to try and catch her, but failed to do so while she rode the current.

However, because she wasn't accustomed to long travels, coupled by the stress of getting kidnapped, the unpalatable food, and the bad environment where she was soaked inside the drainage for a long time, Myuu finally lost her consciousness when she reached both her physical and mental limits. Her consciousness faintly returned thanks to being wrapped in a warm back, and she noticed she was being

held by Hajime.

"The guests set the... price. An auction, huh. For children ranging from the human race and Sea-dweller's tribe to be there, it should be an underground auction."

"... Hajime-san, what should we do?"

Shia, who looked distressed, embraced Myuu closely. Her eyes were clearing expressing she wanted to do something about it. It was normal for the demi-human race to be captured and turned into slaves. Shia who was deprived of her family because of it, understood the fear and pain.

However, Hajime shook his head.

"It should be better to entrust her to the security office."

"That's... you're going to abandon this child and the other children..."

When Shia heard Hajime's words, she gritted her teeth. She closely embraced Myuu as she received the shock and looked at Hajime. What Hajime meant as security office was an organization similar to the police force on Earth. By entrusting her to the government-like facility, Myuu could be separated from them. Although it wasn't an abandonment but a regular procedure of finding lost children, Shia didn't think so.

Hajime tried to explain it to Shia in an easy-to-understand manner.

"You know, Shia. It is the natural thing to send the lost children you find to the security office. Even more so when Myuu is a child of the Sea-dweller tribe. She will surely be protected by them. In addition, to auction someone from Sea-dweller tribe is a great problem. They will investigate it and the other children will be saved. Isn't that enough? Though I'm just guessing, this is probably the dark side of this big city. When Myuu was caught, she would surely placed in a location where the public officials couldn't get their hands there. In other words, this is Fhuren's problem. That's why, isn't it necessary to report it?... Considering your circumstance, I understand your feelings of wanting

to do something, but..."

"Th-That... that is true... But, at the very least can we be the one who take this child? After all, we are going to the sea in the west..."

"Haa~, listen. We are going to the Great Volcano first. Don't tell me, are you going to take her along to the dungeon? Or, are you going to tell her to wait in the desert alone? In the first place, we will be considered as the kidnapper's comrade if we take the kidnapped child of Sea-dweller tribe without permission. So, don't say anything unreasonable like this."

"... Uuh, I understand..."

Apparently, in just a short time,

Shia had come to adore Myuu. Maybe because she read the mood regarding her situation, Myuu clung onto Shia tightly. Myuu seemed to like Shia as well, and felt the need to resist parting from her.

However, what Hajime had suggested was the right thing, so Shia could only nod and droop her shoulders. Hajime bowed to match Myuu's gaze, and began to explain in a way Myuu could understand him.

"Listen, Myuu, we are going to bring you to people who will protect you. Though it might take time, you will surely be returned to the sea in the west."

"...What about Onii-chan and Onee-

chan?" Myuu asked what the two were going to do with an uneasy tone.

"I am sorry but, it will be a goodbye."
"No!"

"Wait, it shouldn't be—"
"No!"

"..."
"Myuu is okay with Onii-chan and Onee-chan! Myuu want to be together!"

Hajime flinched because of the strong rejection. Myuu began to flail around on Shia's lap, just like a spoiled child. Until now, they thought of her as a quiet child, but that apparently was because she

was still trying to ascertain Hajime's and Shia's character. Maybe because she judged them to be people she could trust, she acted spoiled. However, she might still be an originally quiet and a bright child.

Hajime didn't feel bad to be trusted by her, but it was necessary to report the situation to the official, and they could not take Myuu along as they were going to conquer one of the Great Dungeons, «Great Volcano» on their way. Even so, "No– –!!," Myuu rejected with all her might, so he gave up on persuading her, and just took her in his arms to bring her to the security office.

Because Myuu didn't want to

separate from the people she met miraculously and could actually trust, she strongly pulled Hajime's hair, eye-patch, and scratched his cheeks on the way to the security office as a form of resistance. If not for Shia smiling courtesy beside him, Hajime would have likely been reported as a kidnapper. With his hair in a mess, one eye shut because his eye-patch was removed, and the scratches on his cheeks, Hajime arrived at the security office and explained the circumstances to the pop-eyed security personnel.

The expression of the security member who heard the circumstances steepened, and promised to protect Myuu inside the security office, together with the investigation and procedure to

bring Myuu back to her home. Just as Hajime had expected, it was a big problem, and he wanted to excuse himself since the reinforcement should arrive immediately from their headquarters. However...

"Does Onii-chan hate Myuu?" Said by the little girl with moistened eyes together with an upward gaze, no sane person would be able to endure it, including Hajime. "Uh." He groaned. Although he perseveringly explained she would be able to return home if she was with the security uncle, Myuu's sorrowful expression didn't let up in the slightest.

The security member couldn't endure it any longer, somewhat forcefully separated Myuu from

Hajime's party while he was trying to calm her, and Myuu pulled the man's hair while letting out a sad voice. Hajime and Shia had finally left the security office, but naturally, they didn't feel like continuing their date. Shia's eyebrows were wrinkling in worry while she kept looking back at the security office.

Before long, the security office was no longer in sight, and Hajime wanted to say something to make the depress Shia feel better in a place considerably far away from the office. But at that time...

BooOOooMm!!!!!

An explosion occurred behind them, and black smoke could be seen. The location was,

"Ha-Hajime-san. Over there is..."
"Tch, the security office!"

That's right. The place the black smoke was coming from was the security office where they were before. The two nodded at each other, and ran back towards the security office. The worse thing that could happen with such timing entered their minds. The organization which kidnapped Myuu blasted the security office along with Myuu to prevent information leakage.

Suppressing their impatience, they reached the security office. What entered their view were the spectacle of windows' glasses along with the door of the office blown

and scattered into the street. However, the building itself didn't that damaged, so there's no worry of it collapsing. Hajime and Shia entered the building and they discovered the uncle from security collapsed under a cover.

The security officer had both his arms broken, and was unconscious. Similar thing happened to the other security members. Fortunately, there was no life-threatening injury. While Hajime was looking at the security members, Shia went to investigate other places, and returned with a hurried look.

"Hajime-san! I can't find Myuu-chan! Beside th-this!" What Shia handed over was a sheet of paper with something written on it.

"If you don't want the child of Sea-dweller tribe to die, come to __ __ with the white-haired girl from Rabbit-man tribe."

"Hajime-san, this is..."
"Looks like these guys are greedy ones..."

Hajime crumpled the paper in his hand and revealed a savage smile. Those guys probably heard the conversation between Myuu and Hajime's party's in the security office by some means. Afterwards, they judged Myuu was useful as a hostage, and they didn't kill her to silence her because of the thought of obtaining a rare Rabbit-man.

Beside Hajime, was Shia who wore a

resolute expression.

"Hajime-san! I-!"

"Say no more. I know it now. These guys are my enemies... No more tedious talk, we will crush them all and take Myuu back."

"Yes!"

Truthfully, Hajime thought it would be better to quickly separate from Myuu because he didn't want her to have to accompany them to such a dangerous journey. After all, Myuu would only have painful times if they unskillfully gave affection to a mentally cornered child. However, he could not leave her when she has been kidnapped for the second time. There was time, and there was

something he could do. So to leave such a small child while she's in a predicament would surely be "a lonely way of life." In addition, if he decided to abandon her with the reason of her being unrelated to them, Shia would surely grieved about it.

Furthermore, the other party was also trying to get their hands on Shia. To want to covet Hajime's "important" person, they are considered as "enemies." There was no need to pardon them or hold back. These guys had crossed the line not meant to be crossed.

Hajime and Shia readied their arms, and the monsters quickly ran towards the location of the fools who had woken them up.

* * *

"And that's happened. When we arrived at the specified location, there were a crowd of armed thugs, but Myuu herself wasn't there. From the very beginning, they probably thought of killing me and take Shia. For the time being, we massacred everyone except several of them since we wanted to ask Myuu's whereabouts... but they didn't know anything. I tortured the others to find where their hideout is... and the same thing happened."

"Not only me, they were also planning to kidnap Yue-san and Tio-san. That's why this time, we

decided to give them a warning by crushing all of the things related to their organization..."

Yue and Tio, who heard Hajime and Shia's explanation as they moved. With an amazed expressions towards their constitution towards trouble, wondered how the normal date could have turned into something involving the underground organization of this big city.

"... So, we just need to look for a child called Myuu?"

"Yep. What I found from the questioning, was they are a considerably large organization... so there are a lot of facilities related to them. Will you help us?"

"Nn... leave it to me."

"Hmm. This one will certainly do it if it's something asked by Master."

Yue and Tio unhesitatingly answered. Hajime told them what he found out in regards to the whereabouts of the underground organization's hideouts. They then proceeded to search for Myuu and crush the organization in groups of two consisting Hajime-Yue and Shia-Tio. Hajime and Shia went separate ways because they thought it would be better to have someone acquainted to Myuu when they find her.

* * *

Nearby the outer wall of Commercial Ward, there was a place separated from Sightseeing and Craftsman Wards. It was a place where the government's eyes couldn't reach; a complete underworld, the dark side of this big city. It was dim despite it being daytime, and the people walked with gloomy atmosphere.

In the corner of the place, there was a seven story building. Although it was an employment agency on the surface, it was actually the headquarters of the biggest underground organization specializing in "people" trafficking, "Flithof." Normally, the headquarters has an eerily and quiet atmosphere, but now, it was

noisy with people wandering around. The expressions of the thug-like subordinates who served as messengers were perplexed and irritated, which then warped into fear.

Among tens of people that were always going in and out, two people clad in robes from head to toe slipped in during the confusion, and infiltrated Flithof's headquarters without much difficulty. They advanced while avoiding people who were running around, and finally arriving before a conspicuous room at the highest floor. A man's hoarse yell reverberated into the corridor through the door. Hearing him, the robed people quietly removed their hoods and moved stealthily.

"Stop fucking around around! Ah!? Say it again, you bastard!"

"Hii! L-like I reported before, the number of destroyed hideouts has exceeded 50. The attackers were two groups of a pair."

"Then, what's wrong with that? Are you saying Flithof will be destroyed by four shitty bastards? Aa?"

"Th-that's not i— hmph!?"

Inside the room, when they thinking the yell had stopped, something let out thud! sound and silence ruled for a moment. Apparently, the man who was reporting was knocked down by the yelling man.

"You guys, no matter how you do it, bring back those shitty bastards before me, alive. I don't care what state they are in as long as they are alive. If this keeps up, Flithof's reputation will be ruined. That's why I am going to let those bastards see hell while they are alive. It is necessary to show a warning to the others. I will reward the guy who can bring them here with five million Ruta! Five millions each! Tell this to all of the members of the organization!"

Because of the instructions of the man, the room became hectic. Just like what the man had instructed, all the members inside the room left to deliver the message to all of the members in the organization.

The two eavesdroppers put their hoods on, looked at each other, nodded once. One of them took out a war-hammer on her back and took a pose.

The moment the person inside placed his hand on the door knob, the super-heavy war-hammer was swung with considerably centrifugal and gravitational force.

BaaaANNgG!!!

With a thunderous sound, the door was crushed into pieces. The man who was holding onto the doorknob had his right half crushed. In addition, the people behind him had their whole bodies pierced by the splinters, and were instantly had wounds them they were blown

to the other side of the wall.

"There's no need to inform your employees. The people in question have come."

"Hmmm, this one will be responsible for people on the outside. Shia, finish this quickly, okay?"

"Thank you very much, Tio-san."

The people who cultivated the tragedy and casually entered the room were Shia and Tio. Realizing the door had suddenly burst into pieces, and how his subordinates were blown away to the wall across the room; both done so effortlessly, the head of Flithof, Hansen, stiffened and stared wide-eyed. He

regained his senses when he heard Shia's and Tio's voices. He then quickly took out his weapon and spoke like a Yakuza.

"...Ya bastards are the assailants, huh... That figures... Tch, ain't ya da ones from da list. Shia and Tio was it? Da other one is the lil' one, Yue... Indeed y'all's appearances are first rate. Oi, y'all's lives will be saved if ya surrender now, y'know? Don't tell me, ya think ya can return alive after putting ur hands on Flithof's headquart—!?" Swiiiish "UGYAAAA!!!"

Hansen, who began to speak while looking at Shia and Tio with lust, was coldly cut off by Shia, who fired the shotgun, since there was no need for discussion. The numerous

iron balls blew off Hansen's right arm, which spun and crashed into the wall behind, while guy himself screamed and crouched.

Though the organization members who heard the commotion came running, Tio used fire magic to burn the stairs and they could only stand still because they lost the only way up. Furthermore, she used the scaled-down version of "Breath," casually mowing them down, and everything on seventh floor turned completely charred except Hansen's room. With that, there was an unobstructed view of the Flithof's headquarters. Tio fired Wind Blades and Fire Bullets, just like a machine gun, towards the organization members who could do nothing but vacantly look up at the upper floor.

Because of the merciless attacks, the organization members tried to disperse and scattered about in escape... but only few survived.

While Tio handled the people outside, Shia shouldered Doryukken, approached the screaming and writhing Hansen, and pushed Doryukken to his abdomen. "Guwaa," he let out sounds of agony as he tried to move the sledgehammer away, but his right hand was useless against the super heavy Doryukken. The only thing Hansen could do was ungracefully pleaded for his life.

"P-Please. Spare me! You can take as much money as you like! I don't want to be involved with you anymore! That is wh– Gekk!?"

"Please don't speak without permission. You only have to answer my question, understand? If you don't, the weight will increase every second... so I recommend you answer everything before your organs burst."

"... Shia. Thou art Master's companion after all... Thy speech and behavior are the same."

Tio, who retorted from behind, was ignored, and Shia asked Hansen about Myuu. When she mentioned Myuu, Hansen showed a dumbfounded expression for a moment. But when she asked about a child from the Sea-dweller tribe, he frantically answered with an anguished expression because

Doryukken getting heavier by the second. Apparently, she had been transported to the basement of a hall where the underground auction would occur this evening.

Hansen's subordinates, who probably heard the conversation between Shia's party and Myuu, were the ones who planned on kidnapping Shia. They probably thought that by kidnapping her, they could raise their position inside the organization since she was already in the organization's list to be kidnapped.

Shia touched the telepathy stone on her choker, activated it, and contacted Hajime.

"Hajime-san, Hajime-san. Can you

hear me? It's me, Shia."

"...Shia. Yes, I can hear you. What's wrong?"

"I just got the information on Myuu-chan's whereabouts. Hajime-san is currently in Sightseeing Ward, right? Please go ahead because it's around there."

"Roger."

Shia told Hajime the exact location using telepathy. Because of Doryukken's weight, Hansen's complexion had turned blue due to being unable to breathe. Shia deactivated the gravity magic in Doryukken, pulled the normal weighted Doryukken from Hansen and shouldered it. Though he was

released from Doryukken's weight, Hansen's consciousness began to faint because of hemorrhage, and desperately asked for Shia's help.

"H-Help me... Take me to the doctor..."

"It's too convenient for you to use children's lives as food source... In addition, Hajime-san and Yue-san will be angry at me if I let a human like you escape. That's why, goodbye."

"S-Stop!"

Splatter!

Shia shook Doryukken that was swung mightily, to brush off the blood stuck on it, put it on her back,

and faced Tio.

"Tio-san. Let's quickly crush this place and meet with Hajime-san and Yue-san!"

"Whoa... Shia is also merciless, huh... It made this one throbbed slightly..."

"?... Did you just say something?"

"N-Nothing at all."

The words Tio said in a whisper somehow made Shia feel a chill. Although when she asked Tio, there was nothing but her strange feverish expression, so Shia tilted her head as they continued to diligently destroy the Flithof's headquarters.

When Shia and Tio left, what remained was numerous corpses and a mountain of rubble. "Flithof" in Fhuren was one of the three biggest underground organizations, and today, it was easily a annihilated.

Chapter 69: Hajime becomes a Papa III

* * *

After receiving the telepathy from Shia, Hajime and Yue rushed towards the informed location. Being sent to the auction, there was no need to worry about Myuu's life, but she must have quite the mental burden. Either way, they must rescue her quickly.

When they arrived at their destination, two huge men dressed in black was standing at the entrance. Thinking Myuu would be transported somewhere else if he

made a commotion, Hajime moved to a back alley and used transmutation to infiltrate from the basement.

Accompanied by Yue, they moved quickly while using sign interception. It was truly a shame that there was no cardboard. As long as they have it, there would be no need to use sign interception skill...

Before long, numerous cages could be seen deep inside the basement. The only person who guarded the entrance was sleeping. They passed by the guard, and found around ten of human children inside who were cowering from the cold stone floor. Nine out of ten of these children were to be auctioned today.

In truth, because most humans were believer of Church of the Saints, it was forbidden to sell or turn humans into slaves. Even so, criminals among human race could become trade goods. It was okay to sell or enslave those who betrayed God. However, the trembling children before their eyes couldn't have possibly fall into such circumstances where they turned into criminals. To begin with, human who turned into slaves with regular procedures would not be sent to an auction. As such, they have been captured and to be sold illegally.

Hajime went over to the cage and met the gazes of the the children who were frightened by the

silhouette that appeared all of a sudden. He then asked them in a calm voice.

"Was there a child from Sea-dweller tribe here?"

The frightened children must have thought it was their turn to be sold, so they looked at each other, puzzled by the unexpected question. Myuu's figure was not inside the cage, that's why Hajime he asked the children. He wondered whether there was another jail or she had already been taken out.

The children stayed silent for a while, but when Yue squatted down beside Hajime, looked at them with gentle eyes, and muttered, "... It's okay."

They looked slightly at ease, and one of boy with age of around seven to eight years old timidly answered Hajime's question.

"That's, the child from Sea-dweller tribe was taken a while ago... Onii-san, Onee-san, who are you?"

It was as he expected, she had already been taken out. Hajime inwardly clicked his tongue and answered the uneasy boy simply.

"We've come to rescue you."

"Eh!? You are going to rescue us!?"

Hajime's words made the boy inadvertently shout, and raised an astonished and joyed look. His voice

resounded well inside the dim basement jail. Although the boy panickedly covered his mouth, the guard heard him, shouted, "What's with the commotion!?" as he woke up and trotted into the basement jail.

Thus, he found Hajime's party and stiffened for a moment before shouting, "Who are you bastards!?," pulled a dagger and attacked them. The children screamed as they imagine visions of Hajime and Yue collapsing after being stabbed.

However, it was something impossible for it to happen. Hajime casually gripped the thrusted dagger with his left hand, put his strength into it, and crushed the blade. Hajime opened his palm and

dropped the blade's fragments. The guard could not register what happened, he was dumbfounded for a moment, and cast his gaze down to the dagger on his hand, but he could only see the handle. Finally understanding what happened, the man turned pale and backed away while uttering, "Wh-Wh-."
Hajime immediately grabbed the man's head and threw him into the ground.
SQUIIIISH!
The man immediately died, accompanied with a raw sound.
"A guard should first ring the alarm."
Saying such a thing with an amazed expression, Hajime who instantly killed the guard made the children pop-eyed in surprise. Without minding their gazes, Hajime used

transmutation to disassemble the iron bars. In the children's eyes, they saw the iron bars disappeared in an instant which made them stiffened, and their mouths were wide open with surprise.
"Sorry, Yue, but can I entrust them to you? Looks like I can't do anything but rampage now."

"Nn... leave them to me."

"The security officers should arrives soon, too, so it's okay to leave the children to them. The branch head, Ilwa will help us, too... Let's leave the details to him."
Yue was watching from a distance with a somewhat sympathized look. It was directed to the Guild Branch's Head. Actually, before they came here, they had caught a

suitable Adventurer to deliver the telepathy stone to Ilwa, since they thought to explain the situation to him. Status plate with "Gold"-rank was useful in such a time. Because after seeing Hajime's color, the Adventurer stiffened for a moment and his attitude turned into a formal one... It was similar to how the Japanese greeted a Hollywood Star who came to the town. He even saluted as he agreed to listen to his request.
Incidentally, because telepathy stone could not be activated from Ilwa's side, he was made to hear the report one-sidedly; about how they got in a fight against a huge underground organization, and that Hajime left the post-treatment to him which made his face turned white in his office.

Hajime once again transmuted a passage from the oubliette to the surface, entrusted the children to Yue, and quickly went towards the auction hall. At the same time, the boy from before called Hajime to a stop.
"Nii-chan! Thank you for helping us! You can definitely save that girl too! She was truly frightened. Even I couldn't do anything..."
Apparently, this boy didn't care Myuu was a demi-human, and seemed to have tried to encourage her. He was quite the spirited boy, though he himself was caught.
Hajime patted the head of the boy who felt bitter from his powerlessness.
"Wah, wh-what is it?"

"Well, if you feel it was mortifying,

then you only have to become stronger. Rather, there's nothing but to do that. This time is my turn, but next time it's your turn if something comes up."
After saying so, Hajime quickly turned his heels and went out of the oubliette. The boy held his patted head in blank surprise, had sparkling eyes in next moment, and clenched his fists with a slightly manly face. Yue gazed at the boy with pleased gaze and took the children to the surface.

* * *

The auction hall was wrapped in its own bizarre atmosphere.
The guests in the hall were around 100 people. All of them were

wearing queer masks, and no one was making any noise. They only quietly raised placards with numbers when the merchandise they want was up for auction. They hesitated to speak because they didn't want to be identified.

Even those guest who were carefully trying not to let any sound out, involuntarily raised their voices when "that" merchandise came out.

What appeared was a little girl from Sea-dweller tribe inside a square water tank with a distance of two meters in all directions. She was stripped off her clothes, naked, and she shrunk her body as she held onto her knees in the corner of the water tank. Sea-dweller tribe could breathe inside water. It was the

reason why she was put inside the water tank, to prove she was a genuine Sea-dweller. And maybe because she had escaped once, metallic shackles were put on her limbs. It was such a cruel sight for such small limbs.

The numerous gazes that frightened Myuu narrowed and began to compete. Her price went up at a ferocious pace. It was a one time thing, so they probably thought they would be able to buy and hid the Sea-dweller. It was possibly because they had yet to know the commotions that occurred in the daytime.

The noisy hall made Myuu shrink more and more, while clenching her hand that held a black cloth. It was

Hajime's eyepatch. When they tried to separate from Myuu, they were too busy trying to calm Myuu down and it was forgotten. Hajime remembered it later, and he wore a spare eyepatch.

Hajime's eyepatch had became Myuu's small support. Being separated from her mother, forced to go through harsh travel, being put inside dark cage, soaked in the sewage, and she desperately ran away. When she thought it was the end, she was wrapped by something warm. She woke up due to a nice smell, and before her was a white-haired boy that wore the black cloth in one of his eyes. She quietly watched him in surprise, and when she tried to look away, he somehow turned to watch her. Myuu also

became somewhat obstinate and returned his gaze, when a delicious smell she missed tickled her nose.

Afterwards, she answered when he asked her for her name, and when she saw beautiful red lights being emitted, she was put inside a warm bath. Then, a rabbit eared big sister with similar hair color as the boy – though there were some blue hues – washed her body. Unbeknownst to her, she called the big sister who introduced herself as Shia with "Onee-chan," due to the pleasant feeling from the warm bath and gentle washing.

Being held, sitting on her lap, while being able to eat the delicious meats, Myuu would surely not forget this throughout her life. She

was absorbed in being fed, and unbeknownst to her, the boy called Hajime had returned. Although she became slightly cautious, her cautiousness completely dissipated when he took out a lovely clothing, politely dressed her, and blowed her hair dry with warm and comfortable wind.

That's why she was very sad when she heard they would be separated because it was necessary to entrust her to the security office. After being separated from her mother while enduring the solitude and fear for a long time, Myuu didn't want to be separated from the gentle Onii-chan and Onee-chan she met in this faraway place. She wouldn't be able to endure being alone again.

Therefore, Myuu protested with all of her might. She pulled Hajime's hair, scratched his cheeks for so many times, and took the black cloth attached to his eye. She repeatedly said, Myuu wants to stay together! However, the Onii-chan and Onee-chan could not stay with Myuu and as the result, Myuu was left behind.

Myuu thought as her body shrunk more while thinking. As expected, am I left behind because I will be a pain? Are they mad because I took off this black cloth? Am I hated by Onii-chan and Onee-chan? She was very sad, and tears fell from her eyes. If I can meet them once again, I want to apologize for being a pain. I will return this black cloth, and

this time... I want us to somehow stay together.

"Onii-chan... Onee-chan..." Myuu muttered when suddenly, the water tank let out a loud sound because of an impact.

"Eeek!," Myuu became frightened, looked at the surrounding, and she frowned. There was a masked-man in tuxedo nearby, and she noticed him shouting something as he repeatedly kicked the water tank. Apparently, he wanted to let the guests see her swim to further increase her price, and he kicked the water tank because he thought the unmoving Myuu was sleeping.

However, Myuu became even more frightened, further shrunk her body

and didn't move at all. Shrinking her body while strongly clenching onto Hajime's eyepatch as she endured the impact sound and the shaking water tank.

The man who was the host of the underground auction and member of Flithof feared the unmoving Myuu was sick, which would drop her price, so he told a man to bring a rod. It was to be directly thrusted at her to forced her to move. He unintentionally cursed, and became impatient due to the noises made by the guests.

"Good grief, what an irritating brat. Don't you trouble a human like me. You dimwitted blockhead!" The host climbed the stepladder, and tried to thrust the rod at Myuu.

Myuu shut her eyes tightly and prepared for the impact.

However, instead of the impact... what reached her was the voice of a person she wanted to hear the most.

"I will return those words back at you, okay? You shitty bastard."

In the next moment, a shadow fell, fluttered from the ceiling, and trampled the host's head who was crushed along with the stepladder when it fell because of the momentum. Splash! Blood splattered from the host as though he had exploded. He was literally crushed to death.

The shadow, Hajime, who appeared

with such an impact, didn't even glance at the collapsed man, and hit the water tank with his artificial arm. Smash! The water tank was destroyed, accompanied with sound of something being crushed.

"Eeep!" Myuu was thrown outside along with the flowing water, and she screamed unintentionally.

Myuu was immediately caught by something warm, and she timidly opened her eyes. There was the person she wanted to meet, the one she helplessly expected to come when she heard his voice... He was certainly here. She was held by him. Myuu blinked and quietly watched Hajime just like the first time they met.

"Hey, Myuu. You, why are you always sopping wet when we meet?"

Hajime said jokingly, and quietly watched Myuu. She then asked him in a whisper.

"... Onii-chan?"

"I don't know who is this Onii-chan is, but Hajime-san whose hair you pulled, cheeks you scratched, and eyepatch you took is certainly me."

Hajime answered with a wry smile, and Myuu's round pupil moistened. Following that...

"Onii-chan!!!"

She clung onto Hajime's neck

tightly and began to sob. Hajime had a troubled expression, and patted Myuu's back. Afterwards, he agilely wrapped her in blanket.

And the two, Hajime and Myuu, who reunited once again near the water, were surrounded by men in black clothing who hurriedly rushed in. On the guests' seats, there was a commotion and they wondered why Hajime didn't immediately run away. However, even now, he didn't look like he want to run away.

"Brat, looks like you aren't that bright to lay your hands against Flithof. Leave that merchandise and I will give you a nice death, kay?"

Being surrounded by 20 strong

looking men, Myuu raised her face from Hajime's neck and looked up at him with uneasiness. Hajime draw his face closer to Myuu's ear and whispered, It'll be troublesome so close your ears and shut your eyes, and he placed Myuu's small hand to close her ear. Even though Myuu wondered why, she nodded, and she felt at ease because Hajime had a calm attitude without any impatience or anxiety. She obediently used her hands to cover her ears, closed her eyes, and she buried her face in Hajime's chest.

Veins popped on the forehead of the men in black when they were completely ignored, and shouted loudly, Don't hurt the merchandise! And kill the brat! At the same time,

BOooOOoM!!!

With a dry explosive sound, the head of the leader of the men in black burst. Everyone let out an "Eh?," and became pop-eyed without being able to understand anything. They could only watch the man in black collapse with his brain matter scattered from the back of his head. Using that chance, Hajime further fired in succession. While everyone was stiffened due to not knowing what had happened, the sound of rapid-fire rang out, and when they regained their senses, the number of the corpse who had their head burst totaled to 12.

At that time, they finally noticed the boy before them was nothing

ordinary, and the black-clothed men backed away while the guests began to flood the exits, screaming.

"Y-You, what are you! What, how... this—!"

Confused and trying to fight his fear, one of the men in black frantically acted brave by raising his voice. Ten more people came from the interior and flinched when they saw the disastrous scene in the hall.

Seeing them, Hajime snorted.

"Why you ask? Don't you understand just by seeing me? I come here to take back the thing you took from me. Next... is only a warning from me. This will happen to those who takes something from

me. That's why, shall I make the ending a flashy one?"

Hajime said so and used "Aerodynamic" to go up to the ceiling of the hall and unbeknownst to others, he jumped outside from the hole and reached the roof.

"Yue. Myuu was safely secured. How's the thing on your end?"

"... Nn, they have reached the shelter. The final will be after all the guests came out."

"I see, then let's make the Finale a flashy one."

"Nn!"
Hajime used "Aerodynamic," jumping further into the sky. Then,

he spoke to Myuu who faithfully closed her ears and buried her face into Hajime's chest. She blinked and looked at the surrounding when Hajime said, "It is okay now, Myuu," and... "Fuwah!?," she said with a surprised voice.
It couldn't be helped because when she opened her eyes, she was in the sky where she could see every part of the town. On the other side, the setting sun that seemed to be blazing, dying the evening sky in red. Above the ground were the man-made lights glittering, creating a beautiful illumination. Myuu's eyes sparkled seeing the magnificent spectacle for the first time and she held Hajime's chest while saying, Kyaa.
"Onii-chan is amazing! Onii-chan can fly in the sky!"

"Not fly, I just jump—... well whatever. More importantly, I will let Myuu watch some flashy fireworks now, okay?"

"Fireworks?"

"Fireworks is... something like explosion."

"Explosion?"
Though he could not give a good explanation, Hajime didn't mind it since the thing he need to do was still the same. While he holding Myuu with his right arm, he used "Aerodynamic" to stay in the sky, and took out a ring from "Treasure Box." It was a remote detonator of the bomb made with "Induction Stone." In fact, he had scattered the

bombs into suitable locations while looking for Myuu.
"Well then, time to start.
Ta~ma~ya~."

"Ta~ma~ya~?"
The moment Hajime and Myuu's voice resounded in the evening sky, tremendous roars rang the entirety of Fhuren and horrendous impact ran through buildings related to Flithof. Even the museum used as the underground auction hall where, Historical building? Work of arts? Are those delicious?, was said to be crushed to bits. Flames burst out into the sky along with the tremendous explosions. The surrounding buildings and the sky were dyed in red by something other than the evening sun.
"Eeeeh!?"

"What do you think, Myuu? Were you surprised?"

"Fireworks, scary."
Myuu trembled because of the grand explosions, and frantically clung to Hajime.When it came down to the final blow, dark clouds suddenly began to shroud the sky slightly away from them. Following that, four "Thunder Dragons" appeared accompanied with thundering howls. The number had increased though their sizes were half from when there was only one. The four "Thunder Dragons" Yue created scattered into different directions of the blazing red evening sky. Almost all of the people in Fhuren witnessed their majestic forms. The four Thunder

Dragons let our thundering roars and "fell" at the same time onto four of Flithof's important bases that were left behind. Their lightnings dyed the surrounding sky, and the roaring sound of collapsing building resounded within Fhuren. With bursting flames and the scattered dust, the sunset in Fhuren in addition to being dyed in red by flames was just like a town in a war-time after an air raid.

Incidentally, the common people unrelated to this event were unharmed. He had confirmed there was no one around unrelated to Flithof by using Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes into the related facilities and the buildings' circumferences. The people who

were blown off and turned to cinders were only those related to Flithof. Their identities, however, were unidentifiable.
"Hajime-san! Is Myuu-chan okay!?"

"Wa-wait Shia. Eh, that's too fast!"
While he and Myuu was looking at the raising flames and smokes, a telepathy came from Shia. Since Hajime didn't let Shia in on the details of what he was going to do, she was surprised by the explosions and the "Thunder Dragon"s, so she asked while panicking.
"It's okay. She is safe. Looks like... those bastards' bases are all destroyed. Perhaps we should meet at the branch head, Ilwa's place though he might be screaming right now."

"Ha~, thank god~. Branch head's place, is it? Roger. I will immediately go there so please come quickly with Myuu-chan, okay?"

"Ah, okay. Then, see you there."

"Yes."
Because Hajime was suddenly looking at the distance in silent, Myuu looked at him in wonder. When Hajime said, "We will meet with Onee-chan soon, okay?," Myuu smiled happily while saying, "Onee-chan!".
Hajime, who descended to the surface, met up with Yue who had entrusted the children to the securities. She quietly watched Myuu who was held by Hajime. Myuu restlessly looking around, and

then looked up at Hajime. Her eyes were saying, "Who is this person?"
"Myuu, she is Yue. My lover?"
"Eh? Lover? ... Then, Shia-oneechan?"

"My companion."
"Not a lover?"

"Of course not."
"... No matter what?"

"I will say it again and again... my lover is Yue."
"Hmm~"
After being introduced to Yue, Myuu looking at Yue with a somewhat dissatisfied expression. Yue was still watching Myuu quietly. As if to ascertain something, Myuu returned Yue's gaze. The two were staring at each

other for a while, but the balance unexpectedly broken. Yue was trotting closer to them.
"Uhh," Myuu was cautious. However, Yue didn't mind Myuu's cautiousness and took her away from Hajime. Yue made a Kyaa~ sound as she tightly embraced Myuu. "Ugh~" Although Myuu groaned and tried to resist, Yue didn't let her go. After that, she said,
"... So cute."
Apparently, she had come to like Myuu very much. Hah Myuu, who finally caught her breath, raised her face, and she and Yue were looking at each other in a close range.
"... Myuu. I am Yue. You've tried your best alone. Truly admirable." Yue's eyes gently soften, and patted Myuu's head while still embracing

her saying, "Good girl, good girl." With her gentle hand and warm atmosphere, Myuu relaxed and tears began to flow. Then, she began to cry loudly, Waa– When she met Hajime again, she still felt the tension that's why she could not cry. However, at this moment, she relaxed and could let out all of her feelings completely.
With a wry smile, Hajime said, "As expected of Yue," and they waited until Myuu finished crying before heading towards Adventurer Guild's Branch Headquarters.

* * *

"Collapsed buildings, numbered twenty-two. Partially destroyed

ones, numbered forty-four. Completely annihilated buildings, numbered five. Death of 95 members of Flithof confirmed. Disabled, numbered forty-four. Serious injuries, numbered twenty-eight, and 119 people are missing... Well? Do you have anything to say?"

"It went according to the plan. There's neither regret nor a thing to reflect on."

"Haa~~~"
Inside the Adventurer Guild's reception room, Ilwa was glaring at Hajime with a written report in hand. However, from hearing words without any hint of remorse to the figure of a little girl from the Sea-dweller tribe who was eating the tea

cake while hitting on his laps made Ilwa felt completely exhausted.
"Although I thought it couldn't be... I heard Lehman escaped from Meerstat by destroying the water tank and walls, then flew to the sky... It wasn't not your doing, right?"

"... Myuu, this is delicious, too, you know? Try eating it."

"Ah~n."
Although Hajime calmly fed Myuu the cake, Ilwa didn't missed Shia, who was sitting beside him, wavering for a moment. Thus, he once again let out a very , very deep sigh. He rubbed his stomach with a hand, and the head secretary, Datt, casually handed him some stomach medication.

"Well, I won't deny that I felt you overdid it, however, we are also troubled by the underground organization... So I can honestly say you helped us in this matter. They always cleared any evidence, with their outward appearance being a legitimate company, and they could just cut off arrested the ones like a lizard's tail... Frankly, their extermination was a dream for us... But with the balance of the underground world collapsing... Haa, it will need serious cooperation between the Security Bureau and the Adventurers."

"Well, that originally should've been managed by Fhuren's Administrators. This matter only involved us because by some chance, someone wanted to put

their hands on us so we counterattacked..."

"For a counterattack, how did it became annihilating one of three biggest underground organizations based in Fhuren in just half a day? Seriously, I can't even joke about it." Ilwa smiled bitterly and somehow looked like he aged for at least ten more years. Because Hajime felt he was pitiful, he make a proposal to Ilwa.
"We gave those criminal groups such a grand warning, making them think twice of ever trying to meddle with us again. Also, it's okay for Branch Head to use our names, you know? After all, if it's known that the Branch Head was the one who hired "Gold" ranks... It'll be a good deterrent, right?"

"Oya, is it really okay? It will surely become a big help... but aren't you the type who dislikes being used? Ilwa's expression says he wasn't expecting Hajime's words. However, his eyes clearly said, "Eh? Seriously? Of course I will!" Hajime shrugged his shoulders and smiled wryly. "Well, it is a give-and-take. We have troubled you, that's why I don't mind it if it's just that much. I also know you, the Branch Head, will use it with caution. Besides, Fhuren will be involved in a war between underground organizations because of us, and I feel bad to involve the ordinary people."

"... Hmm. Hajime-kun, aren't you changing slightly? When I first met you, I had a feeling you had no

consideration for anyone beside your companions... Did something good happened in Ul?"

"... Well, at least it was not only bad things that happened there."
As expected of this big city's Guild Branch Head, he could clearly judged people. He was able to notice the slight change in Hajime. Since this change was also desirable for Ilwa, he gratefully accepted Hajime's proposal
Later on, although the two organizations planned on raising their influences by taking advantage of Flithof's annihilation, it didn't become just a big when thanks you Ilwa's effective use of the names of Hajime's party similar to how adults would scare children by saying "Namahage will come~"

But because of this, Hajime gained various nicknames such as "Right-hand man of Fhuren's Branch Head," "White-haired, eye-patch, blazing flame-user," and "Little girl-killer"... However, Hajime didn't know of it, and it's no big deal if he had no knowledge of it.

> [T/N: Namahage is a demon-like being, portrayed by men wearing hefty orge masks and traditional straw capes during a New Year's ritual.]

In regards to dealing with Hajime's party who caused such a grand rampage, thanks to Ilwa's effort, connections, and the unexpected help from the Security Bureau who defends the public peace, it became a legitimate case of self-defence. Thus, there was no problem at all.

Apparently, even for the Security Bureau, the case where a child they were entrusted with was kidnapped, along with the bombing of one of their office, had become quite a hit on the head.
In addition, they could not tolerate the underground organization which kept doing illegal acts while making a mockery of them. The bureau director came to greet Hajime's party with truly manly smile to conclude all things, and when he left, somehow his steps were light as though it was humming, "La dida dida."
"Next, about Myuu-kun..."
Ilwa turned his gaze towards Myuu who was munching a cookie she held with both hands like a squirrel. Myuu twitched because of his gaze, uneasily looking up at Hajime, Yue,

and Shia due to not wanting to be separated again. The reason she didn't look at Tio was... it was the elders' role to prevent a child from seeing something harmful.
"She could be entrusted to us and be sent to Elisen according to the legal procedures, or she could be entrusted you to be returned in a form of a commission... Those two are the only ways. What will you choose?"
Hajime inclined his head and wondered if it was okay not to entrust the kidnapped child of Sea-dweller tribe to the officials.
According to Ilwa's explanation, it would be okay to leave her to them because from the beginning, the "Gold"s' rampage was to protect her, Myuu.
"Hajime-san... I, will, absolutely

protect this child. That's why, let her come with us... please."
Shia bowed her head to Hajime. By all means she wanted to be together with Myuu until she was safely returned. Yue and Tio was watching Hajime in silence, leaving the decision up to Hajime.
"Onii-chan... stay together... please?"
It was foul play to say, "Please?," while sending an upward gaze from his own lap. More importantly, when he got Myuu back, he had already considered to take her along if she wished for it, so his decision had been made.
"Well, it would have been be a big help in beginning... But now, I hold her dear so I can't just say something like goodbye."

"Hajime-san!"

"Onii-chan!"
Shia and Myuu were elated and smiled widely. Although it was necessary to conquer the Great Dungeon in «Great Volcano» before they travel to «Seaside town, Elisen», Hajime decided to allow Myuu to accompany and determined in his mind, "Well, we'll manage somehow."
"However, Myuu. Can you stop calling me Onii-chan? It's okay to just call me Hajime. What can I say, the way you call me make me itch."
Because Myuu was hugging him in joy, Hajime said his demand while feeling half embarrassed. For an otaku to be called "Onii-chan"... various things might happen.

Hajime's demand made Myuu puzzled for a moment, but before long she nodded as though she understood it... and she answered with something completely different from what everyone had expected.
"... Papa."

"... Wh-What? Sorry, Myuu. I seems I didn't hear it correctly. Please say it again."

"Papa."

"... I-it must be that, right? A word that means "Onii-chan" or "Hajime" in Sea-dweller tribe's language, right?"

"Ah-uh. Papa is papa."

"Um, wait a sec."
Hajime used his hand to massage his forehead and Shia timidly asked Myuu why she used the word "Papa" to call Hajime. Then...
"You know, Myuu doesn't have a Papa... He had gone to where the God is before Myuu was born... Ki-chan, Lu-chan, and Mi-chan have theirs but only Myuu doesn't... That's why Onii-chan is Papa."

"I somehow understand, but I want to tsukkomi your "that's why," Myuu. Please anything but Papa. I'm still only 17 years old, you know."

"No, it's Papa!"

"Okay. Then Onii-chan is okay! I don't want such an extravagance

title, so stop with Papa!"

"Nooo!! Papa is Myuu's Papa—!"
Afterwards, he tried various things to get Myuu to stop calling him "Papa," but Myuu displayed unexpected stubbornness, even more than the time she called him Onii-chan, and as the result, it was not revoked. As such, he could do nothing but made her mother persuade her when they arrived in Elisen. Hajime's expression looked like he was suffering his greatest damage since the time he came out of the Abyss.
The the discussion with Ilwa was over, they returned to the inn, and a dispute broke out in regards to whom would be called "Mama" by Myuu, and for the time being, Tio who would become a bad influence

to Myuum was rolling on the floor because Hajime had tied her. Naturally, she was excited by it...
In the end, she didn't want to call anyone "Mama" except her real Mama, so Yue, Shia, and even Tio settled with "Onee-chan."
Then at the night, everyone slept together in a kawa-no-ji style because Myuu wished for it. Once again problem occurred on who would sleep beside Myuu and across Hajime. However, the exhausted Hajime made Myuu sleep in between him and Yue. Shia was dissatisfied by this and threw a tantrum, but somehow she was able to sleep after she finished saying all of her complaints.
That day, the 17 years old Hajime became a Papa... and now the journey together with a child began!

* * *

Extra
Yue : "... Hajime."

Hajime : "Nn? What is it, Yue?"

Yue : "... I want a child."

Hajime : "... (*Sweat drips*)."

Yue : "... Jiii– (*Silently appealing with her eyes*)."

Hajime : "... Someday."

Yue : "Nn!"

Shia : "That's~, Hajime san... me, too

(*Fidget, fidget*)."

Hajime : "... I won't."

Tio : "Master, this o— "

Hajime: "Only those existing can joke around"

Tio : "... Haa, haa. Only this one got an immediate reply... Moreover, a merciless one... Haa, haa... I can't hold it anymore!"

Chapter 70 : An Abnormal Situation

* * *

Intense weapons clashing, and explosion sounds rang out inside the dim underground dungeon, with only a faint green light to rely upon. It was so intense that it could be described as severe, and even the far distant wall shook from time to time. Numerous silver-colored sword trails were beautifully drawn in the empty space. Flame bullets, flame spears, wind blades, and water lasers flew about like a barrage. Sound of something hitting tough flesh, angry roars for their

companions, and war cries filled the should be silent space suddenly turning into a battlefield.
"O light cutting through all creation, wind bring forth destruction, scatters and dances around like a whirlpool, and become the storm of light that cut my enemies! Soaring Severation!"
The Holy Sword he had in his hand, along with his wrist blurring as they accelerated, and numerous swords of light released with him, Kouki, as the core. The attacking bat-like demonic beast with the length of about 50 centimeters was instantly cut into ten pieces, and fell into the ground without being able to successfully attack as its blood splattered.
"Vanguard! Counting, ten—!"
"""Roger!"""

Ant-like demonic beasts that moved their jaws, bat-like flying demonic beasts, and sea anemone-like demonic beasts with numerous wriggling tentacles; hey wriggled and moved around inside the 30 meters in diameter round shaped room. The demonic beasts were coming from the eight tunnels all around the room.
This place was «Orcus Great Dungeon» 89th floor. The vanguards, Kouki, Ryuutarou, Shizuku, Nagayama, Hiyama, and Kondou, were matching the countdown timing of the rear guard's all out magic attack. The demonic beasts, which managed to attack the rear guards, were repelled and defeated by Kouki and the vanguards as they wait for the countdown.

The troublesome bat-like flying demonic beasts rushed to attack the rear guards using the space between the vanguards' defense, but were stopped thanks to rampart made by the reliable "Barrier-user."
"O' ephemeral storm, O' invisible shield; rage, blow, swirl, and stop everything, "Wall of Furious Tempest"!"
Taniguchi Suzu activated the offensive defense magic. The chanted spell went right before the rearguards, and breeze could be felt by their outstretched hands. No change could be seen with naked eyes. Even the bat-like demonic beasts didn't notice its presence, and were not alarmed by their instinct. They kept trying to attack the rear-guards who were about to activate large-scale attack magic

spells.
However, before they reached, what met the charging demonic beasts was a wall of air that looked like a huge distortion of space appearing all of a sudden. Tens of those bat-like demonic beasts collided against the wall one after another, but the wall of air only bent without letting even one through.
When all of the charging bat-like demonic beasts had collided, the distorted space exploded, causing great impact as if it had reached its limit. The generated impact was tremendous, and the fleshes crushed by it immediately splattered on the dungeon's walls with sound of raw and death.
Splatter!
"Hmph! I won't let you pass that easily!"

The voice of the class's mood-maker, Suzu, rang in the middle of the intense sound of battle. At the same time, the rear guards simultaneously fired their best attacks. It was an attack where it was necessary for them to be at a distance, since it would defeat the enemies, and struck all those who are close to it.
"Retreat!" With Kouki's order, the vanguards immediately backed away from the demonic beasts.
In the next moment, the magic attacks of six people arrived with such perfect timing.
A huge fireball crashed and simultaneously caused a huge explosion. Meanwhile, a tornado trampled the battlefield, bringing forth vacuum blades which sucked the demonic beasts and cut them

up. On the ground, stone spears shot off with tremendous speed and pierced the demonic beasts' lower parts. At the same time, the icicles falling from above created holes in the demonic beasts' upper bodies. There was no way a living thing would be able to survive inside the sublime space that looked like it was receiving the wrath of nature. The attacks only last for tens of seconds. However, more than 90% of the demonic beasts were dead while the rest were on verge of dying due to grave injuries.
"Alright! This is good! Let's finish the leftover ones quickly!"
With Kouki's shout, the vanguards once again went forwards, and the demonic beasts on the brink of death, couldn't even fight back thanks to the all-out magic attacks,

were finished one by one. Not even five minutes had passed when all of the demonic beasts were annihilated.
The battle ended, but Kouki's party didn't relax their guards and searched their surroundings to see if there were more enemies.

"Phew, next is the 90th floor, huh... We were able to defeat the demonic beasts in this floor without much difficulty... and it looks like the end of the combat training inside this dungeon is near."

"That's why; don't let your guard down. After all, we don't know what kind of demonic beasts and traps are ahead."

"Aren't you worrying too much

about it, Shizuku? Didn't we just an easy battle in a floor no one ever reached? No matter what may come, I will defeat them! Even if it's the Demon race!"
Shizuku cautioned Kouki, who muttered so in deep thought, and the muscle headed Ryuutarou replied with a hearty laugh. Nevertheless, Kouki made fist-to-fist greeting with Ryuutarou, and revealed a fearless smile. Seeing them, Shizuku sighed while rubbing her creased forehead. She came and had followed the extremeness of the two, which ascended her to a stage of a wordly-wise man. My wrinkle hasn't increased again, right?, was her worry as the number of times Shizuku looked in a mirror had sublimely increased. Even so, she didn't restrict the two as she

followed them; truly a good natured person.

* * *

"Hiyama-kun, Kondou-kun, I think you must have recovered by now. But... how are you?"
While the others were discussing the earlier battle, Kaori was doing her duty; to heal the injured people from previous battle, since she was a "Healer." It should be noted that there was another girl with "Healer" class within the 15 people who had undergone combat training by conquering the dungeon, and the duty to heal was divided between the two.
"... Aah, there's no problem now. Thank you, Shirasaki."

"O-Oh, it's okay now. Thanks." Himaya, who was healed by Kaori, was daydreaming due to the close proximity of Kaori's face, and answered absentmindedly. It was obvious he was charmed by her. Even Kondou was saying his gratitude with his reddened ears. Because they were the vanguards, Hiyama and Kondou were frequently in care of Kaori's healing, and yet they still could not get used to coming in contact with Kaori. Although Kondou's attitude was just like a child in puberty... there was darkness inside Hiyama's eyes when he looked at Kaori. The darkness became thicker as days go by... but almost no one noticed it. Hearing their gratitude, Kaori said, "You're welcome," with a smile.

Then, she stood and turned around. When she confirmed no one else was in need of healing, she secretly sighed, and she began to look at the dim passage ahead with eyes filled with anxiety.

"..."

Noticing Kaori's state, Shizuku understood what her best friend felt. Kaori's mind was filled with worries. There were ten more floors until the lowest floor (the general opinion), yet they didn't find any sign of Hajime at all.

Although it meant there was hope, the despair was far stronger. Even if she decided to not believe Hajime was dead until she saw it herself, another floor was conquered, and the negative thoughts that surged when nothing was found, could not be easily put aside. Furthermore,

four months had passed since the day Hajime fell into the abyss. Even if her determination was strong, it was enough time for negative thoughts to begin invading her mind.
Seeing Kaori's appearance while she embraced her artifact, a white staff, tightly, Shizuku called out to her since she could no longer endure it. And, before Shizuku moved, the small mood-maker said, As if I will let Kaori keep worrying like that!, and ran towards her. Bounce, she jumped and embraced Kaori from behind.
"KA-O-RI~N!! There's no need to heal those guys, just heal Suzu a, lot~! Heal me with this and that~"

"Hya! Suzu-chan! Where are you touching! Rather, Suzu-chan should

not have any injury!"

"There is! Suzu's glass-like heart is injured! That's why, spoil me! To put it concretely, use Kaorin's big breasts!"

"B-Brea—... I said stop! Ah, hey! Yanh! Shizuku-chan, help!"

"Haa, Haa, is this good? How about over here? Young lady, you are quite th-puuutt!?"

"... Haa, stop it already, Suzu. I know you don't mind the boys' gaze... But, you should..."
Suzu had transformed into a perverted old man and was groping Kaori's breasts with an expression so sloppy that it couldn't be shown to other human. It was the reason

why she received a head chop from Shizuku, and collapsed.
Incidentally, some of the guys who watched Suzu and Kaori's yuri scene had also collapsed. Suzu was convulsing with lump on her head, and was looked after by Nakamura Eri with a wry smile.
"Uu~, thank you, Shizuku-chan. That was embarrassing..."

"Alright, alright. It is okay now. I have exterminated the pervert, okay?"
Kaori, who clung to her with teary eyes, was gently patted by Shizuku. It was scene that could often be seen recently. Shizuku took a look at Kaori's complexion while she gently stroked Kaori's silky hair. Kaori was looking at Eri who was looking after Suzu with troubled

but somewhat happy expression, and her anxiety from before was no longer there. Apparently, her feeling had changed even if it was a temporary thing. One way or another, Shizuku felt admiration in her mind as she thought, As expected of the class's moodmaker, Suzu (Oldman version).

"There are only ten floors left... Let's do our best, Kaori."
Shizuku put her hands on Kaori's shoulders, and then put some strength into them as she looked straight at Kaori. It was her way to encourage her best friend, so she would not break. Seeing Shizuku, Kaori noticed she had become slightly more timid, so she slapped both of her cheeks and returned Shizuku's gaze with a powerful

gaze.
"Un. Thank you, Shizuku-chan."
Shizuku's worry made Kaori realized again how much Shizuku would support her, and Kaori conveyed her gratitude as her gaze softened as she smiled. Shizuku quietly nodded, and her gaze also softened... Lily flowers were blooming on their sides, but they didn't notice it. Kouki and others who were looking around awkwardly were also unnoticed by Shizuku and Kaori. They were already in their own world after all.
"If it is now... can I protect him?"

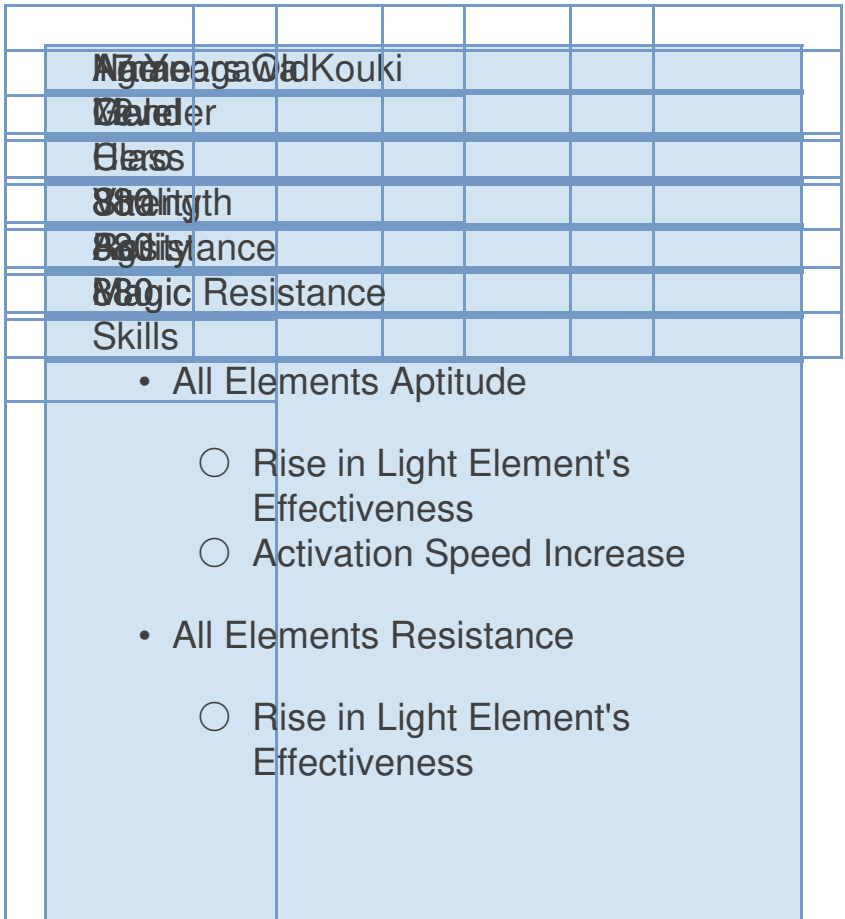
"I see... I am sure you can. We are different from that time... Even our levels have surpassed Meld-san and the other Knights... However, hehe, isn't it possible that he has also

became stronger? Even that time, he was the one who helped us in the end."

"Haha, jeez... Shizuku-chan..."
Kaori believed in Hajime's survival, but she was looking down on her current self, wondering if she could protect him this time, and that's why Shizuku was poking fun at her as a joke. Actually, they would be dumbfounded for various reasons when they found their target... But that is something for the near future.
Incidentally, the ones here were Kouki, Ryuutarou, Shizuku, Kaori, Suzu, Eri, five people including Nagayama Juugo, and Hiyama's gang of four; a total of 15 people, while Meld and the Knights were standing by at 70th floor. Actually,

they were able to start from the 70th floor, since a teleport magic circle that connected 30th and 70th floor was discovered. Though it became easier to move to the lower floor, 70th floor was the limit for Meld and the Knights. To begin with, there were only Meld and few others who could keep up while accompanied by Kouki's party when they were around the 60th floor. Thus, they had only become a hindrance to Kouki's party when they reached 70th floor.
Even Meld was conscious of that. He taught Kouki's party of all the know-how about the dungeon. That's why, he and the Knights decided to try their best to secure a safety zone around the teleportation circle, and only Kouki's party were to move on.

Meld wanted to show a bitter smile due to being exceeded in only four months. But even so, after associating with Kouki's party, he and the Knights were satisfied if their abilities could safely secure a safety zone in 70th floor.
Kouki's party current statuses were something like the following:



- Physical Resistance
    - Recovery Rate Increase
    - Mitigation of Impact
- Composite Magic
- Swordsmanship
- Herculean Strength
- Ground Shrinker
- Prediction
- High Speed Magic Power Recovery
- Sign Perception
- Magic Perception
- Limit Break
- Language Comprehension

Age 37 Years Old
Gender Male
Class Fighter
Strength 280
Agility 280
Magic Resistance 280
Skills

- Hand-to-Hand Fighting Techniques
    - Body Strengthening
    - Part Strengthening
    - Concentrated Strengthening
    - Penetrate and Destroy

- Ground Shrinker
- Physical Resistance
    - Varja
- All Element Resistance
- Language Comprehension

Name	Yasashi Shizuku
Age	72
Gender	Female
Class	Swordswoman
Level	86
Vitality	3,220
Agility	3,220
Magic Resistance	380

Skills

- Swordsmanship
    - Rise in Slashing Speed
    - Rise in Sword Drawing Speed
- Ground Shrinker
    - Great Ground Shrinker
    - Quivering Legs
    - No Beat
- Prediction
- Sign Perception
- Stealth
    - Phantom Attack

- Language Comprehension

Name	Hikari Kato
Age	17 Years Old
Gender	Female
Class	Healer
Level	30
Vitality	300
Mana	1,200
Magic Resistance	

Skills

- Healing Magic
  - Increase in Effectiveness
  - Increase Healing Rate
  - Increase Imaginative Ability
  - Permeation Detection
  - Increase Effective Range
  - Increase in Effectiveness of Distance Healing
  - Increase in Effectiveness of Abnormal State Recovery
  - Decrease in Magic Consumption
  - Increase in Magic Power Efficiency
  - Continuous Activation
  - Simultaneous Activation
  - Delayed Activation
  - Additional Activation
- Light Element Aptitude

- Increase in Activation Speed
- Increase Effectiveness
- Increase Duration
- Continuous Activation
- Simultaneous Activation
- Delayed Activation

- High Speed Magic Power Recovery
  - Meditation
- Language Comprehension

Kaori's Healing Magic and Light Element Aptitude skills were at the extreme. Her healing magic in particular was in the highest rank possible. Just judging by the amount of skills, Kaori's was at least amounted to four people. Furthermore, her current number of skills even exceeded the Hero, Kouki. With tit for tat, everything was definitely for her promise. Believing in his survival, this time,

she would be the one to protect him. It was the result of her single-mindedly repeated the things she could do while spared little time for sleep.
"I think it's about the time to leave... Is it okay now?"
Kouki timidly called out to Kaori and Shizuku, who were still looking at each other. Before, he had witnessed Kaori and Shizuku embracing each other in Kaori's room, so sometimes Kouki's attitude became suspicious, which had taken Kaori aback, but Shizuku knew what was in his mind and only quietly watched him. Her eyes were truly expressing, "Until when are you going to keep this strange misunderstanding, you fool."
Pretending he didn't notice Shizuku's gaze, Kouki ordered the

other members. They had explored 90% of the 89th floor, and the route they were to go now was the last place to explore. Thinking about the structure of the floors up until now, it was about time for them to see the stairs.
The prediction turned out right, and the party discovered the stairs 10 minutes after they moved out. They descended the dim, spiral staircase while confirming the existence of trap. After they descended for around 10 meters, Kouki's party arrived at the 90th floor.
For now, Kouki's party were looking in vigilance for anything that might happen since it was the starting point. However, just by its external appearance, nothing had changed from 80th-ish floors they had just finished exploring. They

immediately began their exploration while mapping. Even if the structure was the same, but they could not let their guard down because the demonic beasts that would appear might be strong ones. In vigilance, Kouki's party explored the passages and rooms with the same structure as before. The exploration progressed easily. Or so it should be, because before long, one by one they made doubtful expressions.
"...What's with this?"
By the time the party reached a deep inside broad space, the incomprehensible feeling reached its peak, and Kouki leaked a questioning voice with a perplexed expression. The other members were also perplexed just like him, so they halted when Kouki asked

the question.
"... Even though we have explored it so much, why we didn't encounter even one demonic beast?"
Their exploration had reached the latter half part, excluding the unneeded passages. Up until now, they would not have been able to advance this easily since they were furiously attacked by strong demonic beasts. Normally, they needed two days to reach the latter half of a floor. However, not even three hours had passed since Kouki's party started exploring the 90th floor. The reason for this progress was simple. They didn't encounter even one demonic beast in this floor.
In the beginning, they thought the demonic beasts were observing Kouki's party from the shadows, but

nothing popped up even when they used their perception skills and magic spells. It was strange for them not even feel the presence of a single demonic beast. It was obviously an abnormal situation.
"...How to say it, it feels eerie. Was nothing here since the beginning?"
Similar to Ryuutarou, the other members also talked about the other possibilities which remain unsolved. Their confusion only deepened.
"... Kouki, shouldn't we return for now? Somehow I feel an ominous premonition. Meld and Knights might know something about this situation."
Shizuku suggested to Kouki while she strengthened her vigilance.
Kouki considered Shizuku's suggestion because he also had a

bad feeling about it, but they must keep advancing no matter what happens, and he thought they would be fine because they could take it easy in the 89th floor, so he hesitated on answering.
While Kouki was hesitating, the party members who explored the nearby surroundings unexpectedly raised their voice when they found something.
"This is... blood..., right?"

"It is hard to discern since the blood assimilate with the color of dim wall... They are all over the wall."

"Oi, oi... this... this is quite the amount."
Nagayama advanced from within the paled party members, and he touched the liquid they thought as

blood with his finger. Afterwards, he confirmed the details by looking and smelling the blood stuck on his finger.
"Amanogawa... we should follow Yaegashi's suggestion... This is demonic beast's blood.
Furthermore, it still fresh."

"Well, if that is demonic beast's blood, it means the demonic beasts around her have all been killed. Not only that, it also means there's strong one who did it... But, won't we be unable to advance unless we defeat it?"
Nagayama shook his head towards Kouki's rebuttal. Even though Nagayama was the second biggest after Ryuutarou, he had a very prudent character unlike the other one. Nagayama watched the

surrounding carefully while being prepared for battle, and told Kouki what he thought about the situation.
"Amanogawa... the demonic beast is likely not to go out of this room alone. We also haven't even encountered one in the passages and rooms up until now. In addition, it is the first time we discovered traces. In other words..."

"... Something must have hidden the traces of the attacked demonic beasts, right?"
Nagayama nodded at Shizuku's words. Even Kouki's expression showed he realized something because of those words. Then, just like Nagayama, he raised his vigilance to the maximum with a stern expression.

"There's also the possibility of demonic beasts becoming more intelligent... But, it was natural to think someone was here... In addition, for only traces in this room not to be hidden, either it means it didn't have the time to do it, or..."

"Here is the last stop."
What succeeded Kouki's words was a never heard before voice of a woman suddenly ringing out. It was a man-like husky voice. Kouki's party became pop-eyed, and they immediately entered battle state. They turned their gazes towards the source of the voice.

Sound of footsteps resounded, but what appeared from deep within the darkness of the spacious hall

was a young woman with blazing red hair. The woman's ears were slightly pointed, and her skin was darkish.
Kouki's party opened their eyes wide in astonishment. The woman's features were something they know very well. Though they have never seen it before, it was a race's characteristics that always appeared inside the lecture from Ishtal and the others – the enemy of the Church of Saints' God, and also the arch-enemy of human race.
It was...
"...Demon race."
Someone muttered, and the woman from Demon race revealed a faint, cold smile.

Chapter 71 : Versus Demon Race I

* * *

The red-haired woman of the Demon race who appeared before Kouki's party revealed a cold smile as she looked at Kouki's party who had widened eyes with surprise.

Similar to her hair, the color of her eyes were also red, and she wore a dull-black rider suit-like clothing. Its design was fitting to her body, so her splendid curves could be seen well even in the dim dungeon. Moreover, there was the opening on the chest area, where the splendid twin hills seemed like it was going

to spill out at any time. Furthermore, her flowing hair behind her, and her characteristically slightly pointed ears was truly captivating. Most of the male students were blushing even though they know it wasn't the right time.

"You are the hero, right? Yes, you, the one wearing a stupidly sparkling armor."

"St-Stupid... sh-shut up! I won't accept being called stupid by someone from Demon race! Besides, why would a person from the Demon race be in a place like this!?"

Kouki spoke without thinking, and used his slight anger to recover

from his surprise, questioning the purpose of the woman of the Demon race.

However, the Demon race woman thought of Kouki's question as annoying and ignored it. Then, she very reluctantly continued saying.

"Haa~ Even though this is absolutely unneeded... Well, this is an order after all... You, I mean the overly sparkling one. Won't you come to our side?"

"Wh-What did you say? Come to your... what do you mean!?"

"Looks like your comprehensive ability is rather low. The meaning is exactly as I said. An invitation for Mr. Hero. I want you to come to our

side. There are various preferential treatments, too, you know?"

Time was needed for Kouki's party to completely understand the unexpected words. Then, the classmates looked at Kouki, who glared at the woman from Demon race with strained and disgusted expression. It was then when they understood what she meant.

"I refuse! How dare you... asking me to betray... Human race... my comrades and the people of this Kingdom! It's exactly as I heard; the Demon race is an evil existence! You purposely came her to invite me, but for you to come alone is too foolish! We have the numbers. So, surrender now!"

Kouki's words made the other classmates felt at ease. They thought Kouki would definitely refuse it, but they could not deny that they were slightly worried about it. However, his childhood friends, Ryuutarou and Shizuku, didn't even worry about it.

On the other side, the woman of the Demon race didn't even pay any attention to the immediate refusal, and she muttered, "I see." In fact, when Kouki's shouted his reply, it annoyed her.

"Well, my superior also said it was okay for your comrades to come with you, you know? So how about it?"

"My answer is still the same! No

matter what you say, I absolutely won't betray Human race!"

Without discussing with his comrades, the representative, Kouki, immediately answered as such. And as though implying the invitation was something unpleasant, Kouki activated the Holy Sword, which then became cladded in light. There's no more need for discussion, and I will use force if you don't surrender!

Behind him, Nagayama and Shizuku clicked their tongues in secret as they took maximum precaution to their surroundings over the Demon race woman. Considering their situation, the two contemplated to change the location even if they must lie to the

Demon race woman. However, Kouki had already answered in anger before they could bring up their idea. Since it could not be helped now, they prepared for anything unexpected to happen.

But if they thought about it, normally, no matter how adept the Demon race were in using magic, they would not come to such a place alone. It was even more unbelievable that she flawlessly manage to annihilate the demonic beasts in the current floor, in addition to not leaving a single trace. If the Demon race was so strong, and she was able to achieve all that, then they would have already trampled the Human race by now.

Besides, the Demon race woman didn't even break a sweat when she reached this floor ahead of the 15 humans. Thinking of how she concealed the signs of combat, it made one fear thinking something laid in wait since they step into the floor, and one would think she had the geographical advantage. It would not be strange if something happen.

The crisis the two had sensed was immediately proven to be correct.

"I see. Then, I won't ask any more. Also let me say this... to invite you is not my main priority, so don't even think of something naive like I won't kill you. Lutos, Havell, Enki. It's time to eat!"

The Demon race woman called out three names and, CRAAASH! Sound of something crushed echoed along with Shizuku and Nagayama's anguished voices when they were blown away at the same time.

"Guh!?"
"Gah!?"

It was not known what blew the two away. With the order of the woman of the Demon race, they sensed the left and right spaces of Kouki's party suddenly blurred. There were "existences" approaching them with speed comparable to "Ground Shrinker," and attacked the unprepared classmates who were watching the conversation between Kouki and the woman of the Demon race.

Even with Shizuku and Nagayama's maximum precaution from the very beginning, they were barely able to notice the surprise attack, and they stood to protect the students who were suddenly the aim of their invisible enemy.

Shizuku was a speedfighter, so her defense is low. Therefore, she drew her swords into a cross towards the blurring space, and tried to jump back to dull the force when she received the impact. However, the enemy's attack power was far greater than she had imagined, so her defense was broken, and she was thrown to the ground, sucking all the air in her lungs. There was even shallow cut on her abdomen.

Nagayama was a "Great Martial

Artist," which owned special aptitude towards defense even among hand-to-hand fighter class. He had acquired the skill derived from "Body Strengthening" called "Body Hardening," which was similar to "Vajra," and both skills had great credibility as they were far stronger than a steel shield. Coupled by his huge figure, his hard to break through defend made him suitable to be called a human fortress.

However, even Nagayama had his defense broken through by that "existence," and was blown away while splattering blood from his deeply wounded arms. He barely escaped the additional damage of crashing into the ground by chance, and landed on Hiyama's gang who

was in the rear.

The glass cracking-like crushed sounds came from the barrier magic Suzu had chanted beforehand; similar to how Shizuku took maximum caution. It was something she did immediately when she instinctively sensed the crisis. The location was at the rear side of the party. She didn't feel the "existences" there, but she somehow used the barrier to not only envelop Shizuku and Nagayama, but also everyone on the rear. It was something she did instinctively which could also be said that it was due to her experience. Her action was extremely correct. Without Suzu's barrier, the third blurred space would mercilessly cut up Nagayama

and other party members.

However, Suzu was immediately blown backward as compensation of splendidly protecting her allies because she directly received the impact from the crushed barrier. Fortunately, Eri was right behind her and she successfully caught Suzu, but the crisis had not ended yet, when the third blurring space immediately began to move in pursuit just like the other two blurring spaces, wounding Shizuku and Nagayama.

Because of the suddenness, those classmates who could not react towards the three approaching blurred spaces... at that moment,

“Give the grace and divine

protection of light to us! “Heavenly Time,” “Heavenly Perimeter,” “Heaven Interruption!”.”

Kaori activated three light magic at the same time with almost no chanting; she was able to omit some of her chants.

The first magic spell was a mid-rank recovery magic, which immediately healed Shizuku and Nagayama, who were wounded, blown away, and landed on the ground. It was a magic spell capable of healing more than two people remotely away from her. Faint white lights poured on the two people who somehow managed to stand up while groaning because of the pain; their wound recovery rate was abnormal.

The second spell was used to allow Suzu and the others to be unnoticable by the three blurred spaces. Similar faint white light poured into them. The light buoyantly expanded, and an area of light appeared at where they were at.

“Heavenly Perimeter” was a mid-ranked recovery magic, and it was the so called auto-regen. Although the duration was long, the amount recovered was little at a time. It had the feature of wrapping the surrounding with light made of magic power while the magic was activated. Kaori was using that feature, and the recovered amount was set to the lowest to indirectly reveal the appearances of the unknown enemies.

What appeared inside the white light were strange demonic beasts with lion head, dragon-like limbs, sharp claws, snake as the tails, and eagle-like wings on their backs — the so called Chimera. They must have peculiar magic for camouflaging. It was a quite troublesome ability, since not only were their appearances camouflaged, their presences as well. However, the fact that they could not exhibit their full power in that state, and thus the blurred spaces, was a blessing in the midst of misfortunes.

After all, even Shizuku and Nagayama who held the best combat prowess among the classmates were incapacitated with only a blow. They were enemies to

be feared. Their powers were completely far above the demonic beasts the students had met on the previous floors, and obviously even stronger than the demonic beasts in this floor.

The three Chimeras readied their claws and fangs in pursuit as though they knew the location even inside the light. Their targets were Shizuku, Nagayama, and Suzu, these three. However, their fangs and claws could not reach the three, since three shields of light appeared before each of them and the attacks were averted in a hair's breadth, and the angle slightly moved while the shields were crushed by the Chimeras' attacks.

They were the mid-ranked defense

spell, “Heaven’s Interruption.” It was the higher ranking version of the beginner-ranked light defensive magic, “Light’s Interruption,” where more than two shields produced at the same time. Even the “Barrier-user,” Suzu was using this magic, and by replenishing the destroyed edges of the shield in high-speed, it was possible to stall time though it’d soon to be destroyed when weakened. In this respect, Kaori could not reached Suzu whose specialty was barrier, since she could not use it like such as even when her aptitude towards light element is high. At best, she could only do minute adjustments to the shield.

However, the shields were helpful. At the moment Suzu’s strong

barrier was destroyed in a blow, Kaori realized her barrier would be useless, so she chose a method to avert the attack. To begin with, she didn't expect the incoming attacks would be the same as before, so it was more like a sink or swim situation. She was lucky it went well.

The three Chimeras whose attacks were averted, became irritated and moved to attack again. The time she gained was only a moment. It was as though the Chimeras didn't find it troublesome. However, there was no change that the most expensive thing to buy was time, even if it was just a moment. Kouki and the others didn't miss that moment.

"Get away from Shizukuuuu!!"

So, is it okay to attack Nagayama?, No one said just a sentence. Perhaps because of anger, Kouki roared and used “Ground Shrinker” to immediately reached the Chimera near Shizuku. Kouki’s movement speed was so fast that he left after images. He swung his Holy Sword towards the Chimera’s neck, and the sword became shinier.

At the same time, Ryuutarou took on the Chimera that went to attack Nagayama with his thrusted fist in a karate stance. Rather than a direct attack, he thought it’d be faster to attack using the gauntlet-type artifact’s ability, shock wave. A war cry came from Ryuutarou and magic power was supplied to the gauntlet.

Furthermore, Eri, who caught the blown away Suzu, thrusted her hand out, began to chant when she felt the same crisis as Suzu, and powerful fire magic was activated. It was a mid-ranked magic called “Sea of Flame,” and just like the name, it was a ranged magic that manipulated tidal waves of flame. Even agile enemy would not be able to easily avoid it.

With sublime power and speed, Kouki swung the Holy Sword down from an upper stance. While Ryuutarou’s thrusted fist drew out a form that couldn’t even be more splendid and resulted in a violent shock wave that went forward just like a cannonball. Eri’s deathbringer, crimson tidal wave surged to swallow its target, turning

it into ashes and dusts.

However...

“”ROOOAAAR!!””
“GuUURawwwr!!”

Unbeknownst to them, some things had hidden themselves. Three shadows roared and attacked Kouki’s party right before their attacks would directly hit their targets.

“”Hmmmph!?””

The suddenness of this situation made Kouki and Ryuutarou felt chills running down their spines. Two of the shadow rushed towards Kouki and Ryuutarou with tremendous power, and the metal maces in their hands were swung

with great speed.

Kouki immediately used the sword's centrifugal force to twist his body while Ryuutarou raised his left hand towards the incoming mace instead of his thrusted out right hand. With his balance broken, Kouki rolled on the ground, and Ryuutarou was blown away by the enemy's second attack, a punch, after he defended against the mace.

What attacked Kouki and Ryuutarou were demonic beasts with appearances similar to Brutal, with a height of 2.5 meters. However, even though they were similar to monsters in RPGs such as Orc and Ogre, the Brutals were like pigs while these demonic beasts were considerably smart.

Furthermore, their Brutal-like bodies were strengthened to their limits. In fact, the strength and speed from the previous surprise attack could not be compared to Brutals.

On the other side, even though Eri didn't receive any direct attack, the psychological impact she received was greater than Kouki and Ryuutarou's. Reason being, the shadow that suddenly appeared opened its mouth and begun to inhale the surging tidal waves at once. WoOOOoosh! The expansive flame gathered at a single point and disappeared. The shadow inhaled all of the flame in only tens of seconds.

What appeared in the space where

the flame and heat disappeared was turtle-like demonic beast with six feet. The shell on its back was dyed in crimson, just like the rampaging flame that earlier changed its target to ashes.

In the next moment, the turtle with six feet finished absorbing the flame and once again opened its mouth wide. At the same time, the shell on its back shined intensely and red light appeared inside its opened mouth. It was just like how energy was collected before a laser beam was fired.

Seeing that, an impatient expression appeared on Eri's face; she had no room to spare since she had just fired her magic. However, her impatient was blown off by the

usual cheerful voice of her best friend in her arms.

“Don’t underestimate me! Come in succession o’ light of protection and be revived as long as I have the will, “Heaven’s Interruption”!”

In a moment, ten light shields appeared in succession before Suzu and Eri. All of the shields were set up diagonally at 45 degree angle. The super-high temperature beam was fired by the six-legged turtle at the same time the shields appeared, and parried upward through where the shields were crushed.

Even so, the power of the beam was greatly above the attack from the previous demonic beasts, since it only needed a moment to pulverize

a shield. Suzu was gritting her teeth and chanted in succession to construct new shields one after another. It could be said it was as expected of a “Barrier-user,” the shield’s construction speed rivaled the speed of the shield’s destruction and succeeded in parrying the six-legged turtle’s beam, barely.

The parried beam hit the dungeon’s ceiling accompanied with great tremor, pulverizing its surroundings, and the scattered scorching minerals fell down like a rain.

“Damn it! What’s just happened!?”

“Just what are those demonic beasts!?”

“Shit, let’s defeat them now!”

Only until the situation progressed this much did Hiyama’s gang and Nagayama’s party slipped out of their confusion and prepared to fight. The wounded Shizuku and Nagayama were also healed completely, and they began to respectively attack the Chimeras.

Shizuku entered the super-high-speed world, and not even her after image could be seen. Voom! Her figure disappeared with a sound of exploded air, appearing right behind the Chimera in the next moment, and she used the sword drawing technique to unsheathe her swords that had returned to their sheaths before anyone noticed.

“No Beat,” it was a skill that enable movement without preliminary action. Rather than simply moving with speed without leaving any after images, one just could not catch up with her movement, which rapidly quicken and slowed. In addition, her sword drawing and slashing speed were further increased by the skills derived from Swordsmanship. The speed of the naked blades was even faster than what an ordinary living being would recognize as a swift flash.

To return the blow she received a while ago, she used one of the Yaegashi-style secret techniques, “Void Severing.” It cut even the space just like its name; at one moment one could see the silver-colored trajectory of the sword, and

the Chimera's snake tail was severed into two in the next moment.

"GURAaaaaWR!!"

Raising roar of anger, the Chimera turned around and swung its sharp claws. However, its attack only cut through the air; Shizuku had already moved to the other side. She swung her two swords, and cut the Chimera's flank.

"Kuh!"

Shizuku used her speed to steadily damage the Chimera. However, Shizuku's expression didn't clear up, inadvertently leaking a sound as though she had been bitten a bitter bug. It was because her calculation

had been wrong. In reality, Shizuku had wanted to cut the Chimera's body apart with the first strike, but she could not do that, and the snake tail entered her slashing range instead. Even the second slash that supposed to cut the Chimera's body in even halves were stopped when it quickly bent its body right before the slashes reached it.

The Chimera could not keep up with Shizuku's speed. However, it was not like it could not respond to her. It could not see her figure, so it was barely able to respond to Shizuku's extreme speed using its reflex speed; a truly troublesome opponent. It was something more than troublesome for Shizuku who wanted to finish the fight quickly and rescue the others.

Afterwards, she swung her swords for the third and fourth times, and though there were numerous wounds on the Chimera's body, they were too shallow to become a mortal wound. In addition, the Chimera began to become accustomed to Shizuku's speed. An impatient expression appeared on Shizuku's face.

The bad things continued for Shizuku, no for all of them.

"CAAAWWWW!!"

When she heard a shriek suddenly resounding around the room, dark red light wrapped the severed tail and wings before her, and the Chimera's wounds immediately healed. Kaori's "Heavenly

Perimeter"'s effect had been significantly lowered, and thus, wounds were not supposed to be healed easily no matter how shallow they were. Shizuku opened her eyes wide and looked at the source of the shriek, while she kept caution towards the healed Chimera.

Thus, unbeknownst to her, the Demon race woman who was standing idly like an unconcerned spectator had a double-headed white crow riding on her shoulder, with one head turned towards Shizuku. More accurately, it was facing the Chimera before Shizuku.

"There's even a healer!?"

She thought she finally wounded

the difficult enemy, but it was immediately healed. Even at the best of times, lots of time would have passed before she could attain the victory. However, now, there was an excellent healer in stand by for the Chimera. Such a situation made Shizuku screamed instinctively.

Not only Shizuku, her comrades at the other places similarly raised bitter screams.

Kouki, who fought the Brutal-look-alike while receiving support, had almost finished after he deeply cut the Brutal-like body from shoulder to the waist, but the crow's other head was looking at the wound, and when it shrieked, it was healed as though time had rewinded.

The same thing happened to Ryuutarou and Nagayama. The second Brutal-look-alike Ryuutarou was fighting had its abdomen hollowed out as though it had exploded, and one of its arm was broken. However, it was immediately healed when the head that was looking at the Chimera Shizuku was fighting against, turned towards it and shrieked. Even the Chimera Nagayama had battled against that had parts of its body caved in was immediately healed.

“Looks like you have quite the hard time. What will you do? Will you come to our side now? If it is now, I will let you think for a while, you know?”

Seeing Kouki's party having a hard fight, the woman of the Demon race clapped her hands with composed attitude and once again spoke to invite them. To begin with, she asked the question knowing what the answer will be, and her expression remained cold. Her expectation turned to be right.

"Don't joke around! We won't yield to your threat! We won't be defeated! And I will give you the proof! Here I go, "Limit Break"!"

The words of the woman of the Demon race made Kouki raised an expression of indignation. He used the Holy Sword to counter the Brutal-look-alike's swung down mace, and used the chance to activate "Limit Break".

Cladded in divine light, Kouki shouted this would be the end, and charged towards the woman of the Demon race.

Chapter 72 : Versus Demon Race II

* * *

“Limit Break,” a skill that temporarily triples ones basic stats using magic power, however, it is literally breaking one’s limit; so, it cannot be used for a long period and the user will be weakened proportionally to the time it was use afterwards. That is because of the severe fatigue and results in the inability to use even half of one’s original power. Therefore, the time and place to use this last-resort skill should be thought out carefully.

Because of the demonic beast’s

strength and recovery, Kouki judged that the morale of his companions would plummet if this kept up, so he used “Limit Break” to immediately defeat the White Crow and the Demon race woman.

With Kouki’s declaration of “Limit Break,” pure white light wrapped around his body. At the same time, the Brutal-look-alike, whose mace attack was counter attacked again, didn’t notice the change in Kouki.

“O’ blade-like will, bear the light and tear my enemy, “Light Sword”!”

Kouki bent his body forward to dodge the Brutal-look-alike’s mace. He then immediately slashed from below using the Holy Sword which was extended by the blade of light.

He had slashed the enemy before by using “Light Sword,” and although it received a severe wound, it wasn’t life-threatening. However, this time he was using “Limit Break,” which tripled his stats, and with the effect of “Light Sword,” the Brutal-look-alike was diagonally cut in two, as though it was made of butter.

One beat later, the Brutal-look-alike’s body shifted diagonally and boom!, it crumbled with a raw sound. Kouki put strength into his legs and immediately accelerated fiercely towards the Demon race woman.

Nothing obstructed the space between Kouki and the Demon race woman. Although it was said that the Demon race was a superior race

in terms of magic, but it was too late for her to do anything. With this, she would be slashed along with the white crow, the end. Everyone thought so.

At that moment,

“”””GUUURAAAAAARRRRRWW!!!”””””

“Wha–!?”

There were six blurred spaces, and they attacked Kouki while roaring loudly. Because the Chimeras were attacking simultaneously from all sides, Kouki instinctively raised an astonished voice and his eyes opened wide.

He immediately slammed the brake, dodging the attack from the front, and used Holy Sword to slash the

Chimera attacking from his right. Next, he believed in the performance of the Holy Armor and endured the deadly attack he received on his back.

However, those were the only things he could do. The claws of the Chimera on his left hit his shoulder. He flew outside of the encirclement when the last Chimera suddenly jumped, dug its foreleg claws on Kouki's shoulders, and pinned him.

"Ack!!" A cry slipped through his grit his teeth.

He was barely able to stop the Chimera that was about to pierce its fangs in the scruff of his neck with Holy Sword. With claws

digging into his shoulders, the power to block the jaws was reduced. Kouki who had already broken his limit was gradually cornered, and he could not bring forth enough power.

“O’ light of grace, bring your healing and warning to this place, “Heavenly Burn”! “Binding Seal”!”

Seeing Kouki in such a pinch, Kaori promptly activated recovery magic spells. “Heavenly Burn” was a mid-ranked healing magic with a single target. Its effect was higher than the recovery magic, “Heavenly Time,” she used earlier to heal several people. However, the Chimera’s claws were digging in Kouki’s shoulders, so it wouldn’t be healed the way things were going.

Therefore, she activated mid-ranked restraining magic of the light element, “Binding Seal,” at the same time she activated the healing magic. “Binding Seal” was a magic that produced a cage of light centering on the confined object – Kaori used that magic on Kouki. The cage of light instantaneously expanded around Kouki and pushed the Chimera away.

With the claws coming out of his shoulders, “Heavenly Burn” demonstrated its effect and Kouki’s wounds were instantly healed.

At the same time, some people from the rear, such as Suzu and the rear guard group who were fighting against the Chimera and the six-legged turtle, released attack magics

towards the Chimeras attacking Kouki. However the distance was too far and they could not get a good aim, even when they had had the effects of Kaori's "Heavenly Perimeter," they were still unable to deal great damages to the Chimeras.

Even so, they were able to buy time for Kouki to regain his balance. Next, he readied his Holy Sword, chanted, and charged to counter attack when he was fully healed.

""Soaring Four Wing Blades""

He swung the Holy Sword which drew a curve in the air, and four slashes of light appeared from the space where he swung at. The targeted Chimeras sensed the crisis

beheld by Kouki's action strengthened by "Limit Break," and immediately jumped away to evade.

However,

"Capture them, "Restrain"!"

With a chantless-like short chant, Kaori activated mid-ranked restraining magic of the light element, "Restrain." Numerous chains of light jumped out from the evading Chimeras' feet and twined around their neck and feet. Though it was not difficult to get out of it with the strength the Chimeras possessed, they were stopped for a moment and could not evade.

As a result, the four Chimeras were directly hit by Kouki's "Soaring

Blade"s and died as their blood splattered around.

Kouki glared and pointed his Holy Sword towards the Demon race woman.

"How regrettable; your last resort was ineffective against us. Now there's nothing else to protect you!"

Upon hearing Kouki's words, the Demon race woman looked dubiously, no, looked at Kouki with amazement. In her mind, she thought, "Why was it necessary for him to declare that now? Wouldn't it be better for him to immediately slash me?"

Even though the Demon race woman should have been cornered,

her composed attitude irritated Kouki. First she let out Chimeras, next Brutal-look-alikes, and now Chimeras again. Those surprise attacks were also the source of his irritation. “You only used surprise attacks and didn’t fight fairly. Moreover, you’re just spectating. What a coward!” Kouki shouted.

“... Well, that’s not my last resort.”

“What a bluff!”

“Anyway, forget about whether or not it’s a bluff, but what will you do after you repel those? I have confirmed your power as the “Heretic Apostles,” so I have no more business with you.”

“What ar—”

“KYAAA!”

“— Kh!?”

The Demon race woman said while going through the trouble of flipping her hair, when a scream rang out from behind him the same time Kouki was questioning her.

Kouki reflexively looked back, and what greeted his eyes were five Brutal-look-alikes and Chimeras. Furthermore, there was a black, four-eyed wolf he had never seen before who was ridden by a 60 centimeter black cat with four tentacles. They simultaneously attacked his comrades and Kouki could see the spectacle where the black cat’s tentacle pierced through the flank of one of his best friends

in Nagayama's party, Nomura Kentarou. The one who screamed was Yoshino Mao, also from Nagayama's party.

"Kentarou! Damn you, don't you get carried away!"

"Mao, calm down! I will heal him!"

A member from their party, Endou Kousuke, slashed the tentacle that pierced Nomura and he glared at the black cat with eyes blazing in anger.

Nomura fell and raised an anguished voice, which made Yoshino dumbfounded, but only to be scolded by Tsuji Ayako who immediately activated healing magic. It was a blessing that she

completed her chant completed before the tentacle cut by Endou healed up.

“Wh–, there are still more–!”

As he looked back, Kouki made a surprised sound because there were new reinforcements that appeared unbeknownst to him.

“The effect of Chimera’s peculiar magic, “Camouflage,” activates on whoever it touched. Or have you not thought of such a thing? Looks, there’s more of them.”

“Kh!?”

The large amount of demonic beasts that suddenly appeared had reversed the situation, and Kouki and his comrades were now the

ones who were inferior in terms of numbers. Seeing that, Kouki hurriedly turned back. To Kouki, the Demon race woman gave away the secret of the Chimera's "Camouflage" effect and further revealed more demonic beasts. Ten four-eyed wolves and black cats appeared from behind her and rushed towards Kouki.

"Kuh— oOO!"

The black cats' tentacles extended at extraordinary speed and attacked Kouki from all directions. Kouki made a pinwheel rotation to cut the incoming tentacles using the Holy Sword, but one of the black cats had gotten close to his side and tried to hit him. It was aiming at Kouki's face, so the jumping black cat

shouldn't have been able avoid his attack mid-air. Kouki said, "One down!," when he was convinced of the demonic beast's death.

However, his conviction was easily overturned in the next moment. Somehow, the black cat did a somersault in mid-air and avoided Kouki's attack. Next, sharp claws that didn't suit the cat's physique targeted Kouki's neck.

Kouki was barely able to move his head and avoided the attack, but he was unable to respond to a four-eyed wolf's attack that came from behind him, due to the collapse of his balance. It didn't result in a serious injury thanks to his defense of his armor and the strength from exceeding his limit. He then

mightily jumped away and returned to his comrades.

With that, the obviously abnormally strong demonic beasts surrounded Kouki's party. Everyone tried to fight back desperately, but what was even more troublesome was that the enemies had suddenly increased in numbers and were cooperating. In addition, the white crow would immediately heal the demonic beasts if they didn't die in one hit.

Although the frontline somehow managed to avoid collapsing, thanks to the continuous healing of Kaori and the other "Healer," Tsuji Ayako, they still could not do anything to break the situation.

Kouki dealt damage to the enemies using the power he gained from “Limit Break,” but it had become impossible for him to attack the demonic beasts with “hit and run” tactic while cooperating with the others.

With high-speed movement comparable to Shizuku’s “No Beat,” the black cat and the four-eyed wolf that possessed a skill called “Prediction,” had excellent teamwork which resulted in the evasion of what should have been a mortal wound.

They desperately fought back, but shadows of despair gradually began to loom over the expression of the classmates. That feeling grew larger thanks to the participation of the

Demon race woman in the battle.

“The golden eyed lizard sleeping in the depth of the ground, the magic-eyed king born in this world, the one who brought the curse of darkness within his view. What I seek is the eternal and everlasting prison of darkness. Neither terror, nor despair, nor sorrow, to lock out my enemies with those eyes, and what remains would be demise, only cold sanction sculptures. Crush everything and return them to the ground! “Final Prison”!”

Immediately after the chant was finished, a gray orb appeared from the woman of the Demon race’s outstretched hand and flew towards Kouki’s party drawing a parabola. Although it could not be called fast,

there's no one currently in Kouki's party who could not evade it. At a glance, it was truly not a marvelous magic, but the one whose abdomen pierced by the tentacle, Nomura Kentarou, was already pale faced because of the blood loss, and became paler. He shouted,

"Kh!? Fuck! Taniguchi—!! Stop that thing! Use your barrier!"

"Eh!? R-Roger! Bring a sanctuary that won't let the God's enemy pass here! "Holy Interruption"!"

Nomura, who was at his wit's end ordered, and Suzu used shortened chants to invoke high-ranked defense magic of the light element. The shining barrier created a dome-like state and surrounded Kouki's

party. Because “Holy Interruption” didn’t have a function to detect friend or foe, there were lots of demonic beasts wrapped inside the dome-like barrier. Not only was it a strong magic, it also had high magic power consumption rate. It was the reason why it was often not used in meaningless fights. However, Nomura’s shout told her the danger of the magic activated by the Demon race woman, so at the very least, she wanted to use a strong barrier magic and immediately chose “Holy Interruption.”

The gray-colored swirling orb immediately collided with the barrier right after Suzu expanded the “Holy Interruption.” The gray orb had tremendous pressure and strength belied by its appearance to

break through the barrier. To not let it break through, Suzu gritted her teeth and desperately endured the feeling of her magic power being consumed.

Then, as if they received an order from the Demon race woman, the demonic beasts' movements changed. Several all of them began to aim at Suzu simultaneously.

"Suzu!"

"Protect Taniguchi!"

Eri fired her magic to obstruct the approaching Brutal-look-alike as she called Suzu's name. With Suzu in the center, there was Eri with Saitou Yoshiki and Kondou Reiichi fighting against a Chimera, and a

four-eyed wolf in opposite of her. Nomura came to Suzu's side.

However, a black cat suddenly appeared from the crack of their defense towards the unmoving Suzu who could not move while maintaining "Holy Interruption." Nomura immediately activated "Stone Spear" and skew it to the ground. However, the black cat was zigzagging mid-air, bent its body to avoid the stone spear, and thrust out all of its tentacles.

"Taniguchii!"

"Agh!?"

Nomura called Suzu's name to warn her, but it was too late. The tentacles had instantly pierced the

Suzu's stomach, thigh, and right arm while she tried to dodge. Her small body was caught and was thrown to the side with a strong force.

With splattered blood, Suzu's back struck the ground and her breath hung. Then, she screamed due to the incapability to endure the severe pain the same time she regained her breath.

"AaAaAUGH!!"

"Suzu-chan!"

"Suzu!"

Hearing her agonized voice, Kaori and Eri instantly screamed Suzu's name. Although Kaori tried to focus her mind to activate healing magic,

but the shining barrier Suzu made had disappeared first.

“Everyone, get away from that orb!”

Nomura warned the others with a voice filled with frustration. However, up till now, no magic could rival Suzu’s impregnable defense, “Holy Interruption.” That was why his warning came too slow.

With the disappearance of the barrier, the swirling grey orb flew mightily, crashed into the ground and exploded soundlessly, and scattered grey smoke to the surroundings tremendously.

Saitou, Kondou, and Nomura, ran towards Suzu who had collapsed in

agony nearby. The grey smoke immediately wrapped around them. There were no shadows of demonic beasts. All of them had simultaneously distanced themselves at once.

The grey smoke continued to extend and tried to engulfed Kouki and the others.

“Come, O’ wind! “Wind Bomb”!”

Kouki immediately used wind magic to create a squall, which pushed the grey smoke outside the room.

Maybe because it was created with magic, the smoke didn’t easily get blown out of the room unlike ordinary smoke, but because

Kouki's magic was strengthened thanks to the "Limit Break," he successfully blew the smoke away after some struggle, into the dungeon passageway.

However, what was left by the smoke was...

"That can't be, Suzu!"

"Nomura-kun"

"Saitou! Kondou!"

Saitou and Kondou had completely petrified and became unable to speak, while Suzu had her lower half of her body petrified, and Nomura who covered Suzu had the left side of his body petrified.

Saitou and Kondou were petrified

with dumbfounded expressions because they didn't understand what had happened. Suzu whose lower half petrified, coupled with severe pain, had lost her consciousness with a truly pained expression.

On the other hand, the one who protected Suzu, Nomura, had the most negligible damage, but he still let out a pained groan while gritting his teeth looking like he seemed to be enduring an acute pain. Nomura's damage was slight because he was an "Earth Magic-user." Carrying the highest aptitude to earth attribute, it was natural he had high resistance against magic from Earth element.

In addition, Nomura

instantaneously saw through the Demon race woman's magic because it was of the Earth element, which he had studied – high-ranked offensive magic, "Final Prison." It was a troublesome magic scattering petrifying grey smoke. Even if it was only a slight touch, the magic would gradually invade the body until one was completely petrified, and the only action to prevent it was to create barrier that'd hold up until the effect has worn off, or use strong magic to blow the smoke away. Moreover, the barrier would also be petrified unless it was a high-ranked one, and the smoke could also only be blown away using a high-ranked magic.

"Bastard! How dare you!"

Kouki raised an enraged expression because of the disaster that fell upon his comrades. Kouki, who was wrapped in a shining light due to the effect of “Limit Break,” began to shine in a brighter dazzling light. He looked like he would charge towards the Demon race woman at any moment.

However, Shizuku acted as a stopper to Kouki when she yelled with an admonishing voice, followed by telling him to withdraw with all of their might.

“Stop! Kouki! Let’s withdraw! The path of retreat is clear now!”

“Wh—!? After what had happened, how can I run away?!”

However, with his fury from seeing his comrades getting hurt, Kouki glared and objected to Shizuku's plan of retreating. The pressure Kouki released rushed towards Shizuku, but she received it as though it was nothing, and pressured him instead with a stern expression.

"Listen! Kaori will surely cure them. However, it'll take time. There's also the possibility of it being too late if we are too slow to treat them. So it is necessary to withdraw now and recover! Besides, we lack three people now, so if you rush out, everyone won't be able to endure the next attack! We'll truly be annihilated!"

"Ugh, but..."

“In addition, isn’t it about time your “Limit Break” reached dangerous time? In this situation, it’ll be truly the end if Kouki is weakened! Please calm down! Everyone also feels the same as you!”

Hearing the logical words of his childhood friend, Kouki hesitated as he bit his lip when he noticed the bleeding at the edge of Shizuku’s lips, and he felt his boiling head go cold. Shizuku was also mortified. Before she knew it, she had cut her lip. Her important comrades had been done in, and if possible she wanted to immediately beat up her enemy.

“Okay! Everyone, time to retreat! Shizuku, Ryuutarou! Please endure it for a little longer!”

“Leave it to me!”

“Right on!”

Kouki thrusted up the Holy Sword and began a long chant. Until now, he didn’t use any long chant because it would not have defused their earlier situation. However, it was now the perfect magic to clear a path for their retreat. But, it became necessary for him to entrust his defense to Shizuku and Ryuutarou because he was completely defenseless when he’s chanting. In other words, they must face the demonic beasts aiming for Kouki. Naturally, even if Shizuku and Ryuutarou could not cope with it, they would still desperately fight back with considerable vigor even with injuries.

“Do you think I’ll let you escape?” When she said this, the Demon race woman ordered the demonic beasts to block the passage behind Kouki’s party. Then, she began to chant magic, with the chanting Kouki as her target.

However, that’s when something abnormal began to happen to the Demon race woman.

“”””ROOOOAR!!”””””

“Kh!? Why!”

Somehow, five of the Chimeras that should be her allies were attacking the woman. While being surprised with widely opened eyes, she immediately resumed and used a shortened chant to activate her

magic. High density of dust clouds became swirling blades with the woman in the center, cutting two of the attacking Chimeras. The attacks from the remaining Chimeras were somehow avoided by blowing herself away using the dust clouds.

The Demon race woman yelled, “Why am I being attacked!?” She was agitated while staring at the Chimeras that attacked her. Then, she noticed something – all of the Chimeras had parts of their bodies destroyed. There’s one that was headless, and one with a deep scar in its body which still had blood dripping from it even now.

“These...”

Just as the Demon race woman

noticed, the five Chimeras that attacked her were the ones defeated by Kouki. The should-be-dead Chimeras stood up and attacked her. The situation was unreal until the Demon race woman recalled a certain magic and muttered, “Don’t tell me...”

“I won’t let you disturb Kouki-kun!”

As she shouted so, Eri swung her hand like a baton and made the corpses of the Chimeras surround the Demon race woman.

“Tch! Necromancer, huh! I didn’t get such information!”

The Demon race woman had prior investigations before she waited in ambush for Kouki’s party. From the

information, there's no mention of someone capable using super difficult magic such as Necromancy, so this situation was completely unexpected. That was because, even though Eri had "Necromancer" as her class, she was bad at it and never use Necromancy in actual combat, but now this fact worked in their favor.

Even if I am bad at it, I'll just overcome it! Eri thought while she glared at the Demon race woman with a powerful gaze, and skillfully manipulated the Chimeras as though it wasn't her first time doing it in actual combat. However, she was just going to buy time rather than defeating the Demon race woman.

In the meantime, Kaori used “Focus” and “Ten Thousand Heavens” on Suzu. Among the party members, Suzu was the one in the direst situation, which was why she decided on focusing healing Suzu first. “Ten Thousand Heavens” was a mid-ranked healing magic of the light element capable of curing abnormal statuses. However, the petrification magic was a considerably strong magic, and she couldn’t cured it all. Though the holes in her abdomen and arm were immediately recovered, she had lost a considerable amount of blood. She was in such a critical situation where needed immediate rest. It was also necessary to heal the hole in her leg the moment her petrification is undone.

Nomura, with a petrified left side of his body, had been diligently worked on to be released from his abnormal state by Tsuji Ayako. Tsuji Ayako had a high aptitude for healing magic, but the fact that Nomura had high resistance against earth magic, made his recovery rate considerably faster. His petrified leg had already been cured.

However, even with that, Tsuji Ayako could only grit her teeth when she sneaked a peek at Kaori swinging her white wand. Although their class was the same, “Healer,” Kaori was obviously above her in terms of capability. Kaori was using magic to simultaneously heal Suzu who had far more serious injuries than Nomura. In addition, she

sometimes used healing magic on Shizuku and Ryuutarou who were in battle to defend Kouki. It was a feat impossible to be mimicked by Ayako. She was mortified and felt miserable because she couldn't heal all of her allies while being in a dire situation.

Although Nomura seemed to want to say something to Ayako in regards to what she was feeling, he thought it was not the right time, so he bore the pain and muttered an incantation.

With their fighting force deceased and Kouki out of the fight, Hiyama and Nakano were covered in wounds as they confronted many demonic beasts. On the other side, Nagayama's party and Eri, who

were protecting the two healers, noticed they had almost reached their limits. With the current flow, it would only be several minutes before they completely exhaust themselves.

Light gathered in Kouki's Holy Sword, but Nakano, who was about to cry at any moment, panicked when she thought of this as a suicidal action. The party members anxiously waited for the time... which finally came.

"Here I go! "Heavenly Downpour"!"

One flashing line fired from the thrusted up Holy Sword. The light exploded and scattered before the ceiling, pouring down towards the surrounding demonic beasts like

meteors.

This “Heavenly Downpour” was an attack magic from light element where it flew above enemies, could pinpoint several enemies, and attacked them simultaneously. Its power wasn’t that high since its power was distributed among the scattered lights, and was originally used to clean up a lot of small fries. But in “Limit Break” state, this bombing-like magic was enough to clean up demonic beasts in 50th floor.

However, the abnormally strong demonic beasts brought by the demon race woman didn’t receive that much damage as expected, and at most, it only blew them away from his comrades as far as

possible. But it was enough for Kouki. By creating a gap, his comrades would be able to retreat while the demon race woman was still occupied by the Chimera controlled by Eri.

Having confirmed so, Kouki demonstrated the characteristic of the magic which had a stupidly long chanting.

“”Converge”!”

As it pour down from the heaven, the rain of light that made the demonic beasts retreat temporarily, once again converged into the Holy Sword. The spectacle where the meteors converged as they left trails was quite a fantastic scene. Kouki thrusted the Holy Sword straight,

and it shone as it cladded in light towards the demonic beasts that positioned themselves before the passage the retreat path of him and his comrades. With a war cry, he pulled the last trigger from the a series of magic.

“”Heavenly Claws Downpour”!”

Immediately, numerous meteors shot like a bombardment when his thrusted the Holy Sword forward. Even though it looked the same as previous attack, it had far stronger power since Kouki used his trump card, “Heaven Might,” and naturally it swept away the demonic beasts that closed their retreat path.

Normally, even if he wanted to use “Heaven Might,” the chant was long

and he didn't want Shizuku and Ryuutarou to protect him any longer than needed.

Even so, "Heavenly Claws Downpour" was the best technique he had in the current situation. The meteor-like torrent of lights went straight towards the demonic beasts blocking their retreat path, and caused numerous explosions simultaneously at the moment of impact. The bombardment that consisted of numerous light bullets exploded like the cluster bomb. The consecutive impacts resulted in the broken balance of the demonic beasts as they were being blown away.

"""ROOOOAR!!"""

The demonic beasts screamed as they closed their eyes. “Heavenly Claws Downpour” had an additional effect, blindness, caused by looking at the flash. The strong light generated in close proximity burnt their sights. Rubbing their eyes with their backhands, the demonic beasts blindly rampaged.

These demonic beasts were already out of Kouki’s party’s path of retreat. A way had opened straight to the passage.

“Now! Let’s retreat!”

With Kouki’s order, everyone simultaneously moved. Nagayama had carried the petrified Kondou and Saitou on his shoulders while Endou shouldered the fainted Suzu.

Even though his left arm was still petrified, Nomura stood up by himself, endured the acute pain, and began to run towards the passage.

“Tch! Don’t let them escape! Capture them!”

While fighting the last two Chimeras, the demon race woman ordered the unharmed demonic beasts. The demonic beasts moved as instructed and began their pursuit at once. Chimeras, four-eyed wolves, and black cats, they were all swift-footed demonic beasts, and the distance between them and Kouki’s party was shortened in less than no time.

It was at that time Nomura turned

around. With pained face, he thrusted out his right hand and revealed a fearless smile.

“Don’t ever think I’ll be defeated in earth magic! It’s my payback! “Final Prison”!”

The same swirling grey orb just like the demon race woman’s magic shot out from Nomura’s hand. The magic orb transmitting petrification smoke collided with the incoming demonic beasts. When the demon race woman activated “Final Prison” a while ago, even without her saying anything, the demonic beasts immediately distanced themselves. That’s why Nomura the demonic beasts could sense the danger that lies within the spell, and chanted it in preparation to use on the

pursuer as he was retreating.

What Nomura concluded turned out to be true. The moment the grey orb shot out, the charging demonic beasts immediately slammed on their brakes and began to jumped back to distance themselves and return to their previous location. At the same time, the smoke became a smokescreen concealing the appearances of Kouki and his comrade as they were retreating.

In addition, Endou used magic to erase the remains of magic power and traces of their smells. Endou's class was an "Assassin," so he had natural talent in covert magic, and the demonic beasts were likely unable to pursue them.

The entrance of the previous room already looked smaller behind them, and maybe it was just their imagination, but mortified howls of demonic beasts seemed like it was resounding.

Kouki's party felt mortified because of their ragged bodies and their comrades who could not open their eyes. However, they also feel glad they survived, and continued to run away without saying anything.

Chapter 73 : Even a Mob-character Has Things It Can Do

* * *

Their current location was the deepest room in the 89th floor.

Currently, there were four entrances within the huge octagonal room, but there was actually one more passage that leads to a hidden room between two entrances. The size of the entrance to this closed room was about 10 tatami, and its entrance was splendidly camouflaged.

Inside the room was Kouki's party, who were resting in complete relief. However, their expressions were uniformly gloomy. There were only those who cast their gaze down in deep frustration. Everyone was covered in wounds, so a lot of them had expressions distorted by pain.

Normally, Kouki would use his charisma to encourage everyone, but now, his whole body was attacked by severe exhaustion due to the recoil from "Limit Break," and he leaned his body in towards the wall, shutting his mouth in silent.

In addition, at such a time, the class moodmaker who could not read the mood in a good way had a pale face due to the loss blood, and was

sleeping with rough breathing as she frowned in pain. This fact was also one of the reasons which made everyone depressed.

Suzu's lower half was still petrified from the knees down, and so Kaori was still continuing the treatment. Her pierced thigh had already been healed. What was left was to undo her petrification. However, Suzu had lost a large amount of blood from the attacks of the tentacles. There was the possibility that her vital blood vessels were damaged. But it could also be said that Kaori made it in time for the healing because she was Kaori.

To begin with, even Kaori was incapable of replenishing Suzu's lost blood. Thus, she was limited to

making Suzu drink the blood-increasing medicine from this world. It was the reason why Suzu's physical condition would not return to normal immediately. It was necessary for her to rest.

Kaori had spent all of her time on Suzu, so the others didn't receive her healing. Naturally, Saitou and Kondou who were petrified into object-like things were kept as they were. After Suzu's treatment ended, next were the petrified two, and the other party members who understood there were still a long wait before it was their turn, didn't complain, except for a small portion of them. It was simply because they did not have energy to do it.

Inside the dim room where the gloomy atmosphere drifted about, Shizuku wrinkled her forehead and was puzzled on how to encourage the others. Naturally, the taciturn Shizuku could not skillfully change the atmosphere, unlike Suzu. However, there was no one else to do so since Kouki was also weakened due to the effect of “Limit Break” and his defeat, so she thought she must somehow do something. She was thinking in such manner because she naturally cared about others. A true worldly-wise person.

Shizuku herself was nearing her limit both physically and mentally, and she was gradually troubled by thinking of what to do. Thus, she decided to make an unable-to-read-

the-mood-style gag with the resolution of dying a honorable death. However, when she considered again, she felt as though she felt herself breaking. Then, Nomura and Tsuji Ayako appeared from the improvised passage and they conversed.

“Fuu, I think it somehow turned into a good camouflation. But as expected, I am exhausted after using such a delicate magic... I’m already at my limit.”

“It’s not in your field of expertise to be able to transform it into wall without any sense of incompatibility... But you even used only one magic array to do that, so it can’t be helped. Cheers for your hard work.”

“You also worked hard to completely undo my petrification, right? Thanks.”

From the conversation of these two people, the one who made this room and camouflaged the entrance into the surrounding wall was the “Earth Magic-user,” Nomura Kentarou.

“Earth Magic-user” held high aptitude towards Earth-Element magic which directly manipulates the ground, but it could not do delicate work such as manufacturing and forming such as “Transmutation.” For example, it could create a bulge in the ground, make rocks fly up from the ground, harden the ground to create a stone spear, or controlling clouds of sand.

In addition, for someone high-ranked, they could use petrification spells and create Golems (completely non-independent doll). However, an Earth Magic user could not produce things by separating or mixing various minerals.

That's why, though it was possible to roughly create a hole on the wall using magic array at hand, to be able to "form" a wall similar to the surrounding walls, Nomura could do nothing but constructed it using only one magic array.

It should be noted that Tsuji Ayako had treated Nomura after he had undid his petrification.

"Thanks for your hard work, Nomura-kun. We should be able to

gain some time with this."

"... I hope so. Well, with this I can do nothing but pray we won't be found until everyone has recovered. About Kousuke... we can only pray, too, huh."

"... Kousuke should be okay. He won't lose to anyone in term of the thinness of his shadow."

"No, Juugo. Don't say that, I feel bad just by hearing it..."

The talk about the increasing safety of their hiding place made the depressed atmosphere slightly relaxed, and Shizuku smiled as she treated Nomura kindly due to the cancellation of creating a black history of her.

On the other hand, Nomura had a bitter smile as he prayed and looked into the distance towards one of his bestfriends who was not here now.

That's right, currently one of their companions was not here. He was Endou Kousuke. With "Assassin" as his class, he was Nagayama Juugo and Nomura Kentarou's best friend. He was neither gloomy nor a poor talker, but his existence was a forgettable one. He was a normal high school boy who could speak casually with anyone, but somehow "his shadow is thin." His figure would be gone before anyone noticed it while saying, "Huh? Where is he?," as they looked at the surrounding only to be surprised that he was right beside them. He demonstrated elusiveness without

any intention of doing it at all. And, of course, it was also the same story when they were still in Japan.

Though the person himself was extremely unwilling, his ability was currently the most useful. Endou alone separated from the party and went to explain the situation to Meld and the Knights. Normally, no matter how much of a cheat the summoned person was, it was suicidal to run through the level 80ish floors alone. Even Kouki's party had little room to spare in conquering the floors, only because there were 15 people cooperating.

But, if it was Endou, a man who could puff up his chest while saying, "The world's thinnest shadow!," he could take full

advantages of his stealth skills and possibly be capable of reaching the 70th floor where Meld and the Knights were without being found by any demonic beast. Thinking so, Kouki's party sent Endou off.

When he left, Endou was slightly teary eyed... surely, he felt something by leaving alone to retreat from his companions. It could not be from his companions' persuasion words, such as: "If it's you with your thin shadow, even keen demonic beasts won't notice you! Only you have a thin shadow that won't lose to anyone, so you must be able to break through the demonic beasts without being noticed."

Truthfully, Kouki's party wanted to

immediately withdraw from the upper floors. However, to their regrets, they didn't have any reserve strength left to do so. Within the party members who were covered in wounds, three of them were in no condition for battle while Kouki was in a weakened state, so they didn't think they would be able to break through the 80's floors.

Of course, they also didn't think Meld and the Knights would come to rescue them. Including Meld, only six people were capable of building their base on the 70th floor. In the party's minds, even by gaining help from other Knight members and the guild's high-ranked adventurers, whose strength came close to Meld, it should be within the safety margin for Meld

and the others to reached the latter half of 70's floors, more than that was asking for the impossible.

Even with that, it would not have any meaning if Kouki's party didn't break through the 80ish floors by themselves. In other words, rather than to call for rescue, the purpose for Endo to go alone was to inform them about their situation and the Demon Race woman who lead the demonic beasts.

Kouki's party had certainly heard from Ishtal and the others from the Church of the Saints that the Demon Race was amassing demonic beasts, not by brainwashing, but enslavement, since the beasts still carried their own wills. But, they never heard of

such strong demonic beasts. And the astounding thing about the demonic beasts should be the “number” not their individual strength.

In fact, the demonic beasts the Demon Race woman lead had easily cleared the human untrodden 90th floor of «Orcus Great Dungeon» and overwhelmed Kouki’s party even with the cheats they carried. Such things made it strange if the human race was not destroyed sooner.

In other words, Ishtal’s information was not mistaken and the conclusion was still that the demonic beasts the Demon Race controlled “had became stronger.” Not only their “number” but also

their individual strength was astounding. Kouki's party judged this information should be conveyed by all means.

"Shirasaki-san. Please take care of Kondou-kun and Saito-kun's de-petrification. It'll take too much time if it is me. But, leave the healing of the others to me."

"Un, okay. Don't push yourself too hard, Tsuji-san."

"I will be okay. Rather, that's my line... sorry. If only I was stronger, Shirasaki-san's responsibility would be decreased..."

On the side of the conversing with Nomura and the others, Ayako was drinking the potion for recovering

magic power and she said to Kaori who was still continuing Suzu's treatment. Though both were "healers," Ayako's abilities was far inferior compared to Kaori's, and even though she didn't show it, Ayako felt herself pathetic and full of apologies, since she could only add more responsibility to Kaori.

"There is no such thing," Kaori replied so with a wry smile, then Ayako turned to heal their companions. Even if it's slight, darkness disappeared from their companions' faces when they recovered by Ayako's healing. Nomura was watching Ayako with a face as though he wanted to say something, but he could not raise a voice since he felt he'd only disturbing her work.

“... In such a situation. Just speak if there’s something you want to say.”

“... Shut up.”

Nagayama said to Nomura with an expression as if he finds something amusing, but Nomura turned his face away as if sulking.

After that, several tens of hours passed. Kouki’s party’s bodies and minds were gradually recovered and they took turns to sleep.

* * *

On the other side, one person, Endou Kousuke was retreating with the entrusted information about the Demon Race. He walked steadily aiming for 70th floor, where Meld and the Knights were, without

entering even one battle.

In the 80th floors, if he was noticed by the demonic beasts, one on one would work out somehow but multiple on one was an out for him. That's why, while hurrying up as much as possible, he advanced with prudent thoughts. Thanks to that, he was able to pass right before demonic beasts unnoticed, even now.

After the demonic beasts were out his sight, Endou got off of the ceiling where he stuck himself. The figure which was completely clad in black to make the best use of "Invisibility," made him look just like an "Assassin." Surely, even the demonic beasts he had just passed by earlier would receive huge

damage if they were to receive a surprise attack from the ceiling. In his mind, he didn't think, "... At least feel a little of my presence..." There was no glittering at the edge of his eyes when he saw the demonic beasts pass through without noticing him at all. Absolutely not.

"I must hurry..."

Endo understood the mission imposed on him. He had guessed Kouki and the others had sent him off to transmit the information which also meant he must survive. Nagayama and Nomura said, "Do not return here," but their wish was transmitted without the need for words.

However, after he fulfilled his duty, Endou was going to return to where Kouki and the others were. No matter what was said, he would not feel good if he was the only one who retreated to safety.

He felt somewhat empty because the demonic beasts didn't notice him, but it was the best weapon for the current Endou as he traced the returning route memorized in his head, and finally he reached 70th floor.

While suppressing his impatience, he went towards the room with the teleport circle where Meld and the others set their base. After a while, Endo's Sign Perception perceived the presence of six people. There's no mistake they were Meld and the

Knights. With this distance, the others should've noticed him since he had deactivated "Invisibility."

Endo turned at the last corner and arrived at teleportation room where Meld and the Knights were. However, even though his figure could completely be seen, Meld and the Knights didn't notice him at all. Endo then approached Meld with eyes of a dead fish, and called him.

"Commander! It's me! Please notice me! It's an emergency!"

"Uoh!? What!? Is it enemy's attack!?"

At the moment Endou raised his voice, Meld yelled, drew his sword, jumped back, and looked at the

surrounding with vigilance. Even the other Knights were surprised and shaken for a moment, then they entered battle stance.

“Like I said, it’s ME! Seriously, please don’t give such reactions!”

“Eh? Wait, it’s Kousuke, huh. Don’t surprise me like that. Rather, what happened to the others? Besides, aren’t you somewhat ragged?”

“I said it before, there’s an emergency!”

When Meld and the Knights understood it was Endou, they relaxed their shoulders because they knew how thin Endou’s shadow was. However, Endou returned earlier than scheduled,

and it was only him. Furthermore, Endou was ragged and covered in wounds, that's why their expressions became stern and guessed something must've happened.

As he was hurting because of the fact even the Kingdom's elite Knights were incapable of noticing him unless he called out to them. However, Endou thought it was not the time for that and he began to talk about the situation rapidly.

At first, Meld and the Knights put on dubious expressions, but their expression tightened as Endo advanced in his story. Then, maybe because his heart was shaken when his story reached to where he retreated alone, Endou was drown

in tears and his head was patted.

“Don’t cry, Kousuke. You are doing something only you can do. Do you think any of them can run through 20 floors in such a short time without even a fight? You’ve done well. I’ve certainly received your words.”

“Commander... I, I’ll return to them now. Even though they’d be able to return here by themselves... even if this time they said they won’t lose... Amanogawa was unable to defeat the enemies even with “Limit Break.” All we could do was to run away. Everyone is considerably exhausted, so even if their injuries heal... if they are attacked... we still don’t understand everything about those bastard demonic beasts...

that's why, please return to the surface and convey this information."

So ashamed that he was crying, Endou rubbed his eyes with his sleeve, and said with a resolute expression.

Meld bit his lip in regret, and handed over the tool bag filled with all of the highest grade healing potions and everything else inside. The other Knights copied Meld's actions, and entrusted their tool bags to Endo, feeling mortified.

"I can only apologize, Kousuke. Although we want to rescue them together... we will just be a hindrance to you..."

“Ah, no, please don’t worry about that. There’s a considerable decrease in the number of our potions, so it will surely help us.”

Saying that, Endou shook the tool bags where various potions were kept with a wry smile, but Meld’s frown only deepened. It was not only because he was mortified with his incapability of helping them, but also due to the bitterness.

“... Kousuke. Now, I will say the worst thing I can say. I don’t care if you scorn me because it’s natural. However, I want you to hear it.”

“Eh? What’s with this all of a sudden...”

“... No matter what happens, please

take only “Kouki” back.”

“Eh?”

Meld’s words made Endou dumbfounded.

“Kousuke. If the demonic beasts are so strong and capable of putting the current you into such a predicament… the Human Race won’t have any future if we lose Kouki. Of course, I believe all of you can go through this and meet again with us, and I wish for that… However, I must say this as the Commander of Herrlicht Kingdom’s Knights. If by some chance it comes to that, please let “Kouki” live.”

“…”

Endou finally guessed what Meld

meant and was dumbfounded. It was to sacrifice anyone to keep the more important one alive, a "choice" that must be done for someone with duty. It was something Endou never thought of. Therefore, Endou's expression had become awfully bitter.

"... We, are we just extras added to Amanogawa?"

"Of course not. For it is true I wish and desire for everyone's survival. No, such words don't have any persuasiveness after I said that... Kousuke, at the very least I want you to convey those words to Shizuku and Ryuutarou."

"..."

Meld's words made Endou's feelings darken. Meld, Endou, and the others had spent much time together. He was always by their sides ever since their beginner days in this world, and they had fought together for a long time. Meld was a big brother-like existence for the students who went to the front lines, and someone they trusted more than anyone in this world. That's why, Endou felt betrayed by Meld who said to cast them away.

Still, he understood the necessity of what Meld said in the corner of his mind, so he could not curse him. With a dark expression, Endo only nodded and turned on his heels.

However, at that moment...

“Kousuke!?”
“Eh!?”

Meld suddenly pushed Kousuke aside and cliiiiing!!, the sound of metal grinding against metal rang out, it came from the drawn sword swung in an arc. Following that, he rotated once and sent a splendid kick towards the blurred space.

BooOOOm!

With such a sound, the blurred space was blown backward. Next, numerous claw marks appeared on the ground five meter from where they were. The claws were probably used to deaccelerate.

Seeing that, Endou, who fell on his butt, turned pale and muttered.

“I-Impossible. For them to catch up now...”

As though using those words as a signal, demonic beasts that had tracked Endo and the Knights, appeared one by one. Endou remained sitting on the ground, shaken to be caught this fast. Until he arrived here, he had used “Assassin” skills to erase his presence, smell, and magic trace while moving. The Demon Race woman was moving while searching for Kouki and the others, so it shouldn’t be possible to catch up with Endou who ran straight to the 70th floor.

Endou’s doubt was erased by the nightmare-like woman who appeared next.

“Tch. Only one, huh... I thought they had escape here where the teleport circle was... Looking at this, looks like they are hiding somewhere.”

Twirling her hair in irritation, the Demon Race woman who appeared riding on a four-eyed wolf’s back, made Meld and the Knights enter battle mode. From her words, the woman thought Kouki’s party would run towards the teleportation circle, and that’s why she came straight to this floor. With her guess off, she seemed to be irritated because she now needed to search around to look for Kouki and the others.

At the same time, it could be said Kouki and the others were still safe.

Endou, Meld, and the Knights looked relieved, and smiled faintly. The demon race woman noticed them and snorted towards Endou and the Knights.

“Whatever, I also have a duty here... Let’s quickly kill them and begin our search.”

Immediately, all of the demonic beasts came attacking. The Chimeras charged and made the space blur, while the black cats covered the distance like a gale. The Brutal-look-alikes were approaching with maces in their hands, and the four-eyed wolves were looking for a chance from behind.

“Make a circle! Defend the teleport

circle to the end! Kousuke! How long are you going to show that disgraceful attitude! Stand up and... run away! To the surface!”

“Eh!?”

As expected of the Kingdom’s elites of the elites. Meld and the Knights promptly made such a formation and cooperated against the incoming demonic beasts. From hearing Endou’s story about the demonic beasts a little while ago, they clearly knew they were obviously inferior in terms of offense, that’s why they chose to only defend and parry.

Endou slipped a surprised voice when Meld said, “Escape to the surface.” If it’s escaping, it would be

better if all of us go together. When Meld said for him to get away from this place, Endou felt that rather than going to the surface, he had a responsibility to return to where Kouki and the others were.

“Stop daydreaming! Tell the surface about the Demon Race!

“B-But, Commander Meld and the Knights…”

“We are… going to made this place our graves! Kousuke! Destroy the teleport circle once you get to the other side! It’ll at least buy you some time!”

“Th-That’s…”

Meld’s intention was clear. Even if they went to the surface, the

demonic beasts would immediately teleport, too, if no one bought them even a little bit of time. If that happened, they'd lose the method to lose the pursuers, and they were likely to be killed when the pursuers catches up. Therefore, the best choice was for only one to escape while the rest buys him some time. If the time could be bought, the other teleportation circle on 30th floor could be destroyed, and he'd lose the pursuers. The teleportation circle was the type carved on the ground, so it could be restored using "transmutation." After one had escaped and told the stationed force on the surface about this, they only have to restore the circle, and it could be used again by Kouki and the others.

The one chosen to escape was Endou, but because Meld previously said to cast away anyone other than Kouki, Endou was puzzled because this time he was told to escape at the expense of the Knights. It was the reason why he could not move immediately.

Toward such an Endou, Meld roared his deepest wish as the intense battle unfolded.

“I am sorry for being powerless! I am sorry I could not help you! I am sorry you weren’t the chosen one! Kousuke! This is the last wish of the worthless me! So please hear it!”

Toward the puzzled Endou, the big bro-like man’s last wish was conveyed.

“Don’t die!”

Those words made Endou understand everything. Meld, in reality, never wanted to let anyone die. If someone must be sacrificed to let the others survive, it would rather be the Knights. Meld and the Knights wished for not only Kouki, but all of the students to survive. For him to be “chosen” made Endou full of bitterness.

Endou bit his lip and used all of his might to turn on his heel towards the teleport circle. It was because he felt he would not be a man if he didn’t answer the wish and resolution of Meld here.

“Don’t think you can!”

The Demon Race woman raised her hand towards a black cat while activating her own magic. The black cat shot out the tentacles on its back with a great velocity. In addition, stone spears also flew in the air riding on her killing intent.

Endou somehow managed to cut the tentacles with his shortsword, and bent his body to the side. It looked like he wouldn't be able to evade the following stone spears. The reason for the his incapability of evading was because of the positioning of the tentacles, and the wonderful timing of the spears that came in succession. Endou gritted his teeth and prepared to receive the impact. Even if he was to receive the attack, he was determined to keep running and

jump into the teleport circle.

However, the expected impact didn't come. One of the Knight had jumped out of the formation and used his body to shield Endou.

"A-Alan-san!"

"Guh... don't worry, and go!"

With the stone spear piercing his abdomen, the Knight named Alan swung his sword to parry the attack of the incoming demonic beasts, and said to Endou with a truly manly smile. Endou strongly bit his lip as though he was biting it off, and ran towards the teleport circle.

"Tch! What persistent small fries! Aim for that boy!" The Demon Race woman sent out new order in a

little haste... but it was too late.

“Hah, this is our victory! Don’t you look down on Herrlicht Kingdom’s Knights!”

Meld revealed a fearless smile as he shouted. At the same time, Endou activated the teleportation circle and disappeared. The Demon Race woman ignored Meld’s words and thrust her hand towards the demonic beast. The demonic beast could directly manipulate magic power, so the teleportation circle could be activated without the need for troublesome chanting. Thus, she thought she could still make it in time, if she was quick enough.

However,

“I told you not to look down on us!”

Meld and the Knights had skillful techniques and teamwork Kouki’s party didn’t have. Using their experiences, they obstructed the incoming demonic beasts’ movements. They were outnumbered, but their defense skill and ability were praiseworthy.

To begin with, it was abnormal for Meld and the Knights to confront these many powerful demonic beasts, no matter how much of a desperate effort they put forth. Alan, whose abdomen pierced by stone spear, was finally exhausted and the balance was destroyed when he fell on his knees, and could not persist against the demonic beasts anymore. With that

opening, one of the Chimeras breached their defense line and reached the teleport circle.

The Chimera disappeared the same time the glow of the magic circle was lost.

“Kuh, one, passed, huh... Kousuke... don’t die.”

Meld’s mutters was erased by the demonic beasts’ roars. Unable to stomach that she let Endou escape, the Demon Race woman sent the demonic beasts simultaneously towards Meld and the Knights.

“Fuh, we have decided our grave would be here, so let’s rampage to the end. Guys, show them the spirit of Herrlicht Kingdom’s Knights.”

“”””””Ou!”””””””

With Meld’s instruction, his subordinate Knights answered with a high-spirited shout. The spirit put into their shouts, even though it was just for a moment, made the surrounding demonic beasts flinch.

… Ten minutes passed

Silence once again returned to the room with teleportation circle on the 70th floor.

* * *

“Uwaaaaa—!!”

With a shout mixed in between scream and war cry, Endou jumped out from the teleportation circle in «Orcus Great Dungeon»’s 30th

floor, immediately wielded his shortsword, and tried to destroy the magic circle before him.

“Wh-What!? Eh, you! What are you doing!?”

“Stop him.”

“Catch him.”

A black-clothed boy appeared from the teleportation circle, suddenly raised a shout and began to destroy the magic circle with the sword in his hand. This made the surrounding people, dressed as Knights, stand in blank surprise for a moment then they raised angry roars and jumped at Endou to obstruct his destructive action.

These guys were Meld’s

subordinates who was responsible of protecting the teleportation circle on the 30th floor. Because of the force deficiency, there were people who were at their limit just by guarding the 30th floor. Unable to destroy the magic circle with a blow, Endou struck for the second time, for the third time, and when he only need one more swing to destroy the circle, he was barely stopped from destroying the magic circle.

“L-Let go! If it’s not destroyed, quickly! Those bastards will-! Let go!”

“Wh-, aren’t you from the Hero’s party!? Why are you…”

After seeing him closely, the

Knights knew the person acting like a madman was one of the hero's companions, and the Knights spontaneously loosened their holds as they whispered voices of surprise. With that chance, Endou once again swung his shortsword and destroyed a part of the magic circle, but he was one step too slow.

The magic circle once again glowed and activated. Thus, in the next moment, a blurred space attacked Endou and the Knights.

"Damn it!"

"What's—! Guuaaa!!"

Endou immediately jumped back and was barely able to evade the Chimera's attack. However, the

Knights who didn't know the situation and should have been able to evade, defenselessly received the Chimera's claw attack, and died with deeply torn armor.

One of their comrades who suddenly sprayed blood, made the other Knights panic. Endou frantically shouted towards the Knights with a voice filled with impatience.

"It's an enemy! Be careful of the blurring space! More will come if we don't destroy the magic circle!"

Endou's scream-like voice made the Knights regain their senses. However, at the same time, one more person was slashed and blown away. There were seven people

guarding the teleportation circle on the 30th floor. And now two had been killed.

Endou grit his teeth towards the fact and used an “Assassin” skill called “Wallrun,” to run on the ceiling and aimed to destroy the magic circle from above. However, the Chimera noticed him and tried to intercept him by jumping.

Although they still didn’t understand what had happened, the Knights guessed it was necessary and jumped towards the Chimera that was trying to attack Endou. However, the Knights could only see the Chimera as a blurred space, so naturally they didn’t understand what kind of attack it had; they understood nothing about it. That’s

why, the Knight who jumped behind the Chimera had his neck bitten by the tail-snake, while the Knights right beside its flank was beaten by its wings and thrown to the ground.

Nevertheless, it was not meaningless. The Chimera somewhat lost its balance and Endou was able to evade its dangerous claws and fangs. It was not a complete evasion since his shoulder and flank were gouged, but the snake tail was slashed, and the Chimera fell into the ground when they passed each other.

The Chimera flapped its wings to regain its balance to land on the ground slightly away from them, while Endou immediately stood up

after he fell on his shoulder and simultaneously swung his short sword in his hand towards the previously damaged teleportation circle.

At the same time it landed, the Chimera turned around and once again rushed to kill Endou. However, at that time, Endou's shortsword was already pierced the magic circle with all of his might. BAM!, a clear sound effect rang out. It was the evidence the magic circle had been destroyed. The trace of magic when the teleportation magic circle was used had disappeared.

"With this—... kh... gaa, AaAAAAAH!!!"

Succeeded in destroying the

teleportation circle, Endou inadvertently leaked a relieved sigh because no more pursuers would come. However, the Chimera's fangs bored into his right arm in the next moment, and he screamed due to the sharp pain. The strong jaws tried to bite off Endou's right arm.

The Knights charged towards it and used all of their might to attack the Chimera in order to disturb it. The Chimera whose side were pierced by strengthened short spears, inadvertently loosened the force on its jaws. Endou pulled out his right arm, slipped out the concealed knife from his left sleeve, and slashed the Chimera's eye.

The rampaging Chimera slashed

two more Knights to death when they approached it to give it the finishing blows. Endou threw the knife in his hand, but the Chimera, with a slashed eye, evaded by instinct.

Immediately, one of the Knights suddenly raised a scream. He inadvertently looked towards the source and saw the Knight who previously had his neck bitten by the snake, was beaten to the ground. The Knight's lips turned purple, writhed in pain, and died in no time.

"Damn it!"

Seeing that, the last Knight ran out to kill the snake, but it was a fatal mistake. The Chimera whose back

was turned to the Knight noticed the incoming enemy and immediately attacked. Covered in wounds, Endou squeezed out all of his remaining strength, and activated his certain kill attack towards the neck of Chimera that attacked the Knight.

“DieeEEEEE!!”

Being separated from his companions, forced to desert Meld and the Knights, for the Knights he knew to be killed, and various grudges mixed into his shout, he struck a fatal blow demonstrating all of his power. He tore the Chimera’s neck from the nape, and it died in a moment.

Due to the inertia, Endou who

sprang from the Chimera's flank, crossed it, and rolled tremendously once he reached the ground. Enduring the pain in his shoulder, right arm, and flank, Endou lifted his upper body with his left arm to confirm, and burn the Chimera's death into his eyes.

The Chimera laid quietly looking to be completely dead due to the partly torn up neck. However, Endou's expression was weak as though he was going to cry rather than feeling joy, and he couldn't help but whisper, "Damn it!"

Before his gaze was the figure of the last Knight who rushed out. He was falling prone. With sword gripped in his right hand, his face had turned purple. Beside him, was

the torn up snake. Perhaps, right before the Chimera attacked, he slashed the snake that sprung to him and his face might be bathed by the toxin inside its body. Resultantly, all of the Knights who were guarding 30th floor had been annihilated.

Because he could not save even one person, Endou cried as he shouted, “Damn it!,” many times. He shouted the same words for a while, and Endou, who thought he had died due to blood loss, took out the highest grade ointments and recovery potions from the tool bags he got from Meld and the Knights. After his wounds were treated by the emergency set, he silently lined the Knights’ corpses in a corner of the room where the teleportation

circle was.

For a little while, Endou watched the Knights' figures, and slowly turned around to advanced a step toward the surface. His face was as pale as a ghost, and his eyes were hollow without any ambition. Thinking "Once again only I survived," Endou's heart was tightened by a heavy, cold chain. The current him moved his body just like a machine that only had to fulfill the role he was entrusted with, and he single-mindedly aimed towards the surface.

Chapter 74 : The Nostalgic Holad

* * *

“Hyahha—! Yeah!” As if such a sound could be heard, a dense, enormous, and fierce pressure mercilessly attacked the Adventurers aiming at Hajime’s party. The bloodlust that was previously coming from the Adventurers seemed nothing but a childish tantrum compared to this. As if also carrying physical force, the immature Adventurers immediately lost their consciousness while all of the standing Adventurers were re-seated without even having the

time to tremble.

With Raisen Grand Canyon to their left, and a magnificent meadow to their right, the magic driven two and four-wheelers advanced towards the west with the sun at their backs. Raising a cloud of dust on the highway as it advanced by the four-wheeler's side, the two-wheeler went back and forth between the barren ground and the meadow by the canyon side as it roared noisily, merrily even.

"... Seems like Shia is in a good mood. She even shouted just like those guys from the end of the century."

"... Hmm. I also want to try it."

In the four-wheeler's driver seat, Hajime muttered with an amazed expression with one hand steering the vehicle, while the elbow of his other hand was on the window frame. Just as Hajime said, Shia was not riding on the four-wheeler. She was driving the two-wheeler alone.

To begin with, Shia truly liked the feeling of cutting through the wind as the two-wheeler advanced, but the number of people had increased recently and their main transportation method changed to that of the four-wheeler, which made her dissatisfied. Though she could feel the wind if she put her head out the window, she could not be satisfied with that and she could not stick to Hajime like when they used the two-wheeler because the

seat next to him was reserved for Yue. Thus, she asked Hajime to teach her how to drive the two-wheeler.

The magic-driven two-wheeler could be operated easily as long as one could use direct magic power manipulation. Depending on the circumstances, direct magic power manipulation could also be used to control the steering without the need to grip it. Thus, this was not that difficult for Shia, and she quickly learned how to drive it. Following that, she became enamoured with the two-wheeler.

Even now, she moved left and right while squeaking, she even drifted and popped a wheelie. Furthermore, she also did jackknife and backride

techniques which would not lose to a professional extreme motorcycle stunt artist. The acceleration and braking could be done by manipulating her magic power, so it was far easier to operate than the one on Earth... Still, she kept up with Hajime's pace. Shia's rabbit ears even said, "Hey, hey, what do you think about my technique?" as they sometimes turned towards Hajime with a somewhat cheeky expression, which was simply irritating.

Occasionally, there were those whose character would change when they drive, and Shia might be one of them. Seeing Shia, Yue by Hajime's side also wanted to try driving it herself. Yue even said, "Hyahha—!" but Hajime decided to

absolutely stop her as he felt the mood would become awful. Also, beside Hajime was the three or four year-old Myuu putting her head out of the window at Yue's side, as she steadily climbed from Yue's lap with sparkling eyes. Pointing her hand towards Shia, who began to stand while steering with one hand, Myuu began pleading to Hajime.

"Papa! Papa! Myuu also wants to do that!"

"I already said you can't."

Sitting on Yue's lap, Myuu, whose wish was denied began to whine and said, "No! Myuu wants to!" to Hajime. So as to not let the whining Myuu fall from the seat, Yue hugged her from behind and

scolded her with, “...don’t whine!”
“Uu~” Myuu raised a cute groan and Hajime showed a face as though to say it couldn’t be helped towards the depressed Myuu.

“Myuu. I’ll drive it with you later, so be patient.”

“Ehh~? Really?”

“Mhm. I won’t permit you to board it with Shia... but it’s okay if it is with me.”

“So, Myuu can’t drive it with Shia-oneechan?”

“Mhm, absolutely. Just look at her. This time she’s making a strange pose while steering. Though something come to my mind... I absolutely won’t let you get on the

vehicle with someone who drives dangerously."

Standing above the steer, Shia raised an American-like laughter while making a strange pose where her right hand's fingers spreaded and hid her face while her left arm hung down with the shoulder slightly raised. As he stared at Shia who made Joke-like pose, Hajime pointed at Myuu. 'Don't copy Shia, okay?', he said.

"To begin with, I don't want you to get on the two-wheeler because it'll be dangerous... should I make a child seat? The materials will be... mumble, mumble."

"Yue-oneechan. Papa is mumbling. How strange."

“... Hajime papa is just worried about Myuu... unexpectedly overprotective.”

“Fufu, does it mean Master is an unexpectedly indulgent person? Hmm, this gap somehow... haa, haa.”

“Yue-oneechan. Tio-oneechan is panting.”

“... It is an incurable disease so just ignore her.”

Serving as Myuu’s conversation partner, Yue patted Myuu’s head, who was gazing up at her.

Only a little time had passed since they started traveling with Myuu, but Hajime had already given up about Myuu calling him, “Papa.” At

first, he used every possible means to change the way she called him, but Myuu began to tear up every time, and her trembling eyes silently appealed, “Is it bad? Does Papa hate Myuu?” Even Hajime, who was capable of beating the demonic beasts in the abyss to a pulp could not win against Myuu, just like how he could not go against Yue. Resultantly, he could not change it and it was established that he would be called “Papa.”

As he allowed (he gave up) her to call him “Papa,” Hajime began to worry about Myuu. Even now, it could be said he was being overprotective. Shia is a shameless rabbit while Tio is a pervert, so I must protect Myuu until she returns to her mother! or so he

thought. During the time when he begins to be too meddlesome, Yue was the one who became the stopper, as well as the one in charge of teaching Myuu about common sense, and that's the current composition of Hajime's party.

Because Myuu was glued to Hajime, Yue couldn't flirt with him, and she became somewhat dissatisfied, but she felt it could not be helped since she had also come to adore the cute Myuu.

While silently firing her magic towards Tio, who was panting and concentrating on her delusion in the back seat to silence her, Yue was covering Myuu's ears since it would be bad for her education. Thus, with Hajime who was still

mumbling about making the seat for Myuu, and Shia on the two-wheeler with only the rear wheel touching the ground, I must keep calm! Yue made an empty resolve.

* * *

Hajime's party were currently at the Post Town, Holad.

Normally they would just pass through here, but because of a request from the head of Fhuren branch Adventurer Guild, Ilwa, they must stop on their way here. Even so, it didn't take too much time as they passed here along their way to «Guryuu-en Great Desert».

Hajime walked towards Holad branch guild along the main street

with nostalgic gaze. Riding on Hajime's shoulders, Myuu noticed his state and used her small hand to tap on Hajime in curiosity.

"Papa? Did something happened?"

"Nn? Ah~, well, I've come here before... though it's only been four months, it feels like years to me..."

"... Hajime, are you okay?"

Yue, whose hands were affixed on Hajime's arm, had a complex expression while looking at him anxiously. Hajime shrugged and his atmosphere returned to the usual in the next moment.

"Ah, there's no problem. It's just that, I was absorbed in my emotions because it's been such a long time. I

remember that everything started here... After a night spent in tension, fear, and even desperation, I went to the dungeon on the next day... and then I fell."

"..."

Hajime felt that in a way, that day could be called a fateful day. His monologue made Yue and the girls listen to him in a serious mood. Yue was silently looking at Hajime. And Tio asked Hajime questions out of curiosity.

"Hmm. Dost Master want to return to that day? After all, there's the case of Master's companions, too, right? Though Master hast his own circumstances... After all, thither's not only those whom hast hurteth

master, right? Was thither not someone master got along with?"

Because Tio's relationship with Hajime's party was still shallow, she would sometimes frankly ask about things she should be careful about even though she knew what was going through Hajime's mind. It was because she didn't want to only become a travel companion, so Tio put forth great effort to truly become a comrade in Hajime's party. Although she was a pervert, in a way she favored Hajime.

That's why Hajime listened to Tio's question without being bothered by it. Thus, he exhaled and recalled the midnight tea party under the moonlight. With the unpalatable tea, there was the white negligee

and black hair which reflected the moonlight, whose owner swore to protect him, and at the last moment, she stretched her hand out towards him with a bitter expression as her companions pinioned her...

Unexpectedly, he felt a trembling hand on his arm which made him regain his senses. When he looked at the source, Yue was looking straight at him with strong, resolute gaze, and her trembling hand tightly grasped Hajime's sleeve.

Hajime matched Yue's gaze and returned to silently gazing at her with a soft and gentle gaze.

"Certainly, there was someone... However, even if I could return to

those days, I will still tread on this path of mine."

"Heh~, why?"

Although she knew the answer from Hajime's expression, Tio still asked with a slightly amused expression. Without averting his gaze from Yue, Hajime used his other hand to gently grasp Yue's hand which was grasping his sleeve. Yue had a faintly smiling expression, and her cheeks were slightly dyed in red.

"Of course... it's because I want to meet Yue."

"... Hajime."

In the town of Holad, «Orcus Great Dungeon» made it possible to raise

level quickly while selling the magic stones within the safety margin. Thus, Adventurers, Mercenaries, and Kingdom Soldiers gathered, together with a lot of merchants as their partner in business. The town displayed serious hustle and bustle. Naturally, the main street of such a town would have increased bustle.

Within the main street where a lot of people were doing their activities, Hajime and Yue suddenly halted and were looking at each other. They created their own world without minding their surroundings. They reached out to each other's cheeks, and their atmosphere looked like they were about to kiss at any moment. Though they had somewhat gathered a crowd around them, and

they were showered by gazes filled with curiosity and jealousy, Hajime and Yue didn't notice them at all. They could only see each other.

"Tio-san, did you hear that? It isn't "you" that Hajime-san wants to meet, is it? It's only Yue-san. Once again, they created their own world. They don't even care about their location and situation. And we can only watch them from the side, can't we?

I feel it is about the time that such an atmosphere should be created between me and Hajime-san. Even though I'm always prepared to receive such treatment, it always passed me by, and to be treated as a regrettable character... No, I understand, you know? I know Yue-

san is special. I yearn for a relationship just like those two, that's why I want to stay together with them.

What I mean is, it's natural Yue-san is special and I feel it's a good thing. Rather, Hajime-san who neglects Yue-san is not Hajime-san. If that happens and Yue-san becomes sad because of it, I'll be the one who beat Hajime-san to a pulp.

However, it is a however, kay? Recently, Hajime-san has become slightly dere~ I wonder if it's about time I climb the stairs to adulthood~ I expected that, but it didn't come true. No matter how special Yue-san is, wouldn't it okay for Hajime-san to look at me a little

more? It is shameful for a man to refuse a woman's offer.

Even though it was easily understood that I welcomed him, he sloppily answered with a composed face to ignore it, this dimwit!, I thought so, but I never thought of complaining. I just want to flirt! Then, doing this and that on the bed! Even the hardcore play he did with Yue-san! I thought of those! So, what does Tio-san, the representative of all perverts, think!?"

"Sh-Shia. This one knows thou hast saved up thy resentment, but calm down. Rather, the one who shouted while not paying attention to the location is art thou. Also, to casually speak ill of this one in the

end... To be treated as a pervert in such a public place, haa, haa, made everyone look at this one with cold gazes... Haa, haa, ngh, ngh."

In the middle of the main street, the rabbit-eared girl shouted she wanted to do erotic things while speaking ill of the perverted beautiful woman whom began panting due to the atmosphere. The people who had gathered due to their curiosity were taken aback and they backed away.

"Papa~, Shia-oneechan and Tio-oneechan are..."

"Myuu. Don't look at them. Just act as if we don't know them."

"...Shia... next time, I will tie Hajime

and together with Shia…”

Shia’s shout was noticed by Hajime and Yue, and they returned to their senses. However, for now, they acted as though they didn’t know either Shia or Tio, and not looked at them because Myuu had become dumbfounded.

Although Yue whispered something frightening, Hajime decided he didn’t hear anything. But if he was worried about it, he would think of the possibility of the trap the next time he is with Yue. But he wanted to be pardoned from doing that. If it is Yue, such a thing… would not… happen, right? Surely, probably… it’ll be safe even though there’s a previous offense! Hajime tried to persuade himself.

Because from the distance, What's with this commotion!, the town guards could be seen everywhere, Hajime reluctantly dragged Shia and Tio by the scruff of their necks to get out of this place. Every time they went to the town, gazes filled with envy and jealousy pierced Hajime who was surrounded by beautiful girls and beautiful woman... However, he didn't know why only this time he felt there were a lot of sympathetic gazes. Surely it's only his imagination.

* * *

Ignoring the gazes of the people, Hajime's party finally arrived at Holad branch Adventurer Guild. With Myuu on his shoulders just like before, Hajime opened the

guild's door. Unlike the one in the other towns, the Holad branch's door was made of metal. The heavy sound became a signal that someone was entering the building.

It was the first time he came here, since the last time he was in town, he neither had business here nor did he had the time to go to the adventurer guild. The atmosphere inside Holad branch was just like an adventurer guild Hajime had expected from the beginning.

There were broken parts of the walls and floor which were roughly patched up. Mud and stains from something were here and there, giving an insanitary impression. The interior was just like the other branches where the counter was

near the entrance with a restaurant on the left. However, unlike the other branches, alcohol was served here, and there were old men hanging around to drink during the daytime. There was also the second floor where Adventurer-like people were looking down by the handrails. The people in the second floor gave off the atmosphere of a strong group. He didn't know if it was an unspoken rule, but high-ranked Adventurers seemed to be on the second floor.

The atmosphere around the Adventurers was also different from the other towns. Everyone was glaring at them, and there was none of the heartwarming atmosphere compared to the one in Brook town. It could be said to be natural,

because the Adventurers and Mercenaries were filled with spirit since these experts in battle and fighting demonic beasts would voluntarily enter the dungeon.

However, there was a tense atmosphere inside the guild and something seemed unusual. Something had obviously occurred since the Adventurers had serious expressions.

At the moment Hajime's party entered the guild, the Adventurers turned their gazes towards them simultaneously. Their gazes were so sharp, that it felt like it would be able to penetrate through them which made Myuu, who was still riding on Hajime's shoulders, to shout, "Eeek!," and she quickly

clung to Hajime's head. Because Hajime appeared with a little girl on his shoulders while being surrounded by pretty girls and a beautiful woman, the Adventurers began to let out their bloodlust which contained various meaning. Myuu trembled even more. She was put down from Hajime's shoulders, and was now held with his right hand. Myuu buried her head on Hajime's chest to completely shut herself out of the surroundings.

With a youthful vigor, rather the Adventurers were just intoxicated by their own vigor, some of them began to stand from their seats. "Let's beat up this brat," was what their gazes implied, with an outburst of anger to release their resentment came from guild

wrapped in bizarre atmosphere, and it was obvious they disliked Hajime's party.

There was a possibility Hajime's party were clients... but these Adventurers seemed to have never thought of that. The talk would be after they beat him up or something like that, and those who thought so, stepped forward towards Hajime.

However, Hajime, who recently became Papa, was an overprotective one. Even though it was temporary, he could not remain silent if someone frightened his daughter. Veins had already popped up on Hajime's forehead and, contrary to his hand which was gently calming Myuu, his gaze was fierce.

Thus...

BaaaANG!!

As if that sound could be heard, a dense, enormous, and fierce pressure mercilessly attacked the Adventurers aiming at Hajime's party. The bloodlust that previously came from the Adventurers was a childish tantrum compared to this. As if carrying physical force, too, the immature Adventurers immediately lost their consciousness while all of the standing Adventurers were re-seated without being given the time to tremble.

Even those who didn't lose their consciousness from Hajime's pressure, "Pressure" and "Magic

Power Emission," were desperately supporting their body and consciousness while most were trembling with pale faces, and with cold sweat.

After a moment that felt like an eternity, the pressure weakened. The Adventurers used that chance to frantically take a breath. Though there were those who accidentally pissed and vomited on themselves... Hajime was smirking to them while he spoke.

"Oi, to those aiming at us."

"""""""" !""""""""

The Adventurers were surprised and shaken by Hajime's voice. The gazes that timidly looked at Hajime

had fear stuck in them as if they were looking at a monster. However, without caring about such a thing, Hajime demanded... ordered them.

“Laugh.”

“”””””””Eh?”””””””

The Adventurers were puzzled due to the situation, ignoring order. So, Hajime continued his words.

“Did you not hear me? I said, laugh. Smile. Appeal to her that there’s nothing to be afraid of. Waves your hands, too. This child is frightened because of you. What will you do if she gets traumatized by it? Ah? Ah? So, amend for it.”

Then, don’t bring such a young

child here!, was what the Adventurers wanted to retort, but they could not since the other party was a monster. Because Hajime's sharp gaze pierced the puzzled them, they frantically tried to force a smile even though their cheeks were extremely stiff. Along with that, they began to wave their hands, too.

The appearance of the the fierce looking men with good body builds floating smile with cramped cheeks while lightly waving their hands, was truly surreal. However, without worrying about such things, Hajime nodded and whispered to Myuu whose face was buried in Hajime's chest.

Because of what he said, Myuu

timidly raised her face, and her moistened eyes looked up to Hajime. Next, she slowly turned around while being urged by Hajime's gaze. Naturally, there were the fierce and trained people desperately trying to look friendly.

"Eeek!"

As expected, Myuu was still frightened and returned to Hajime's chest. Hajime frowned. With more piercing glare at the Adventurers that said, "Bastard, what's with this!" "Don't be unreasonable!," was what the Adventurers rebutted in their minds, and they finally turned their gazes towards Yue and the others by Hajime's side to plead for help.

Receiving their gazes, “Haa~,” Yue sighed deeply, approached Myuu, and whispered something to her ear similar to what Hajime had done earlier. Thus, Myuu once again timidly raised her face and looked at the Adventurers. The Adventurers panickedly tried to look friendly.

For a while, Myuu silently watched the Adventurers and, as if she understood something, she smiled and waved her small hand back. Because her smile and gesture were so lovely, the trained men inadvertently calmed down while forgetting the situation. Hajime was also satisfied, and once again carried Myuu on his shoulders. Then, he walked towards the counter as though he didn’t have

any more interest in the Adventurers.

The moment Hajime's party arrived before the counter, ignoring the crumbling sounds that rang out here and there, they told their purpose to the receptionist.

By the way, the receptionist, a girl, was a lovely one. A cheerful girl who was at least as old as Hajime. It seemed the usual template was here. But most noticeable was the tension and big confusion that appeared on the attractive receptionist's expression.

"Is the branch head here? I have a letter from Fhuren branch head... but he said to personally hand it over."

As he said so, Hajime presented his status plate to the receptionist. Although she seemed to be filled with tension, the receptionist sat up and received the status plate just like a pro.

“Th-Thank you. You can entrust it to me. E-excuse me, just what kind of request did the Fhuren’s... branch head had?”

Normally, no mere adventurer would receive any request from a branch head, so the receptionist displayed a slightly dubious expression. However, her eyes opened wide when she saw the information displayed by Hajime’s status plate.

“G-“Gold” rank!?”

Among Adventurers, not even 10% of them were “Gold” ranked. Thus, all of the guild personnel were told about the “Gold” rank ones so they would be able to recognize them. Naturally, this receptionist also knew of all the “Gold” ranked Adventurers. However, she unintentionally leaked a surprised voice because she didn’t know about Hajime.

Her voice made the Adventurers, guild staff members, and everyone inside the guild building opened their eyes wide in surprise. And just like the receptionist, they stared at Hajime. The building interior became noisy.

The receptionist turned pale as she realized she just exposed an

individual's information loudly. Thus, she began to bow at tremendous pace.

"I-I am sorry! I truly am sorry about it!"

"Ah~, no need for that. It's not like I mind it. So, can you convey this to the branch head now?"

"Y-Yes! Please wait for a moment!"

The receptionist who seemed as though she would continue to apologize if he didn't say anything made Hajime smile wryly. After the small battle in UI and the great rampage that annihilated an underground organization in Fhuren, he thought it'd already be too late to try to hide his identity.

The “Gold” ranked adventurer boy who brought along a child and a harem of pretty girls as well as a beautiful woman made him gather attention inside the guild building. Nevertheless, Hajime’s party gave off a clear attitude that it was the usual as they waited for the receptionist. Unaccustomed to being in the center of attention, Myuu felt uncomfortable, only to be comforted by everyone in Hajime’s party. Because the way Tio comforted her was bad for Myuu’s education, a slap visited her cheek. Thus, it raised further commotion, but was ignored as expected.

Before long, rather not even five minutes had passed, someone ran from inside the interior with loud footsteps. Hajime’s party paid

attention to the sound and wondered what happened. A boy clad in black jumped out from the passage behind the counter and skidded on the floor due to the momentum. As though he was looking for someone, the boy began to look around.

Hajime remembered the person. He was dumbfounded since he never thought he would meet him again in such a place, and thus he muttered inadvertently.

“... Endou?”

Chapter 75 : To Accomplish One's Obligation

* * *

"... Endou?"

Hajime's mutter made the black-clothed boy, Endou Kousuke, respond with "!," a response similar to a certain cardboard-loving mercenary when an enemy appeared in a game. He kept looking around and began to shout as if he was irritated, because he could not find the one he was looking for.

“Nagumoo! Are you here!? Is it really you!? Where are you!? Nagumoo! Come out if you’re alive! Nagumo Hajimee—!”

Because his shout was too loud, one by one people began to shut their ears with their fingers. His voice was filled with desperation since he wanted to ascertain whether the should be dead classmate of his had survived.

Yue and the girls turned their gazes towards Hajime. With an expression as if he didn’t want to be involved in this, Hajime scratched his cheek and spoke towards Endou who repeatedly shouted his name out loud.

“Ah~, Endou? I can hear you just

fine so stop repeatedly shouting my name."

"!? Nagumo! Where are you!?"

Endou turned his face towards Hajime, reacting to Hajime's voice. Hajime was inadvertently taken aback because Endou looked so desperate.

For a moment, Endou's gaze met Hajime's, but he immediately averted his gaze and began to look around again.

"Damn it! I can't see him even though I can hear his voice! Is he a ghost now? As expected, he returned as a ghost!? So that's why I cannot see him!?"

"No, I am right in front of you, you

big idiot. Rather, calm down already. You whose thinness shadow ranked the best in the whole world."

"!? Again, his voice!? Wait, whose shadow did you say was so thin that even the convenience store's automatic door didn't react to it and disappears from time to time! The automatic door opened at least one of three tries!"

"So, it didn't open two times in three tries... as expected of you."

After conversing that much, Endou finally noticed the source was the white-haired, eye-patched boy before him and he began to carefully observe Hajime's face. Towards Hajime, who averted his

face since he felt unpleasant due to not having a hobby where he'd be pleased from being watched by a man, Endou spoke as if he could not believe what he perceived.

"Y-You... are you... Nagumo?"

"Haa... yeah, that's right. Though I look like this now, I am Nagumo Hajime."

As he carefully observed Hajime from head to toe, Endou became dubious because Hajime was quite different from the one in his memory, but he finally believed Hajime after looking at his features and how he knew about the thinness of his shadow.

"So... you are alive."

“Of course, after all I am right before you now.”

“Somehow, no you have completely changed… Your looks, atmosphere, and tone…”

“I crawled up from that abyss with my own power, you know? So, of course, I’ve changed.”

“I-Is that so? No, but, I see… You really are alive…”

Although Endou was perplexed by Hajime’s blunt attitude, his gaze softened as he was relieved that the classmate he thought to be dead was alive. No matter how he envied him like the other boys because Kaori paid attention to Hajime, and how he pretended to not see

Hiyama's gang bullying Hajime, nothing was more frightening than thinking Hajime had died. Hajime's death had such a great impact. That's why Endou was purely glad his classmate was alive.

"Rather... when did you become an Adventurer? Moreover, a "Gold"..."

"Nn~, well it just happened."

After Hajime replied, Endou's expression completely changed. The relieved expression he had because his classmate was alive, had changed into an expression as if he was in a pinch. Hajime looked at Endou again and he noticed Endou was in ragtag state. He tilted his head, wondering what had happened.

“... In other words, you came back alive from the depths of the dungeon by yourself, and became strong enough to gain the Adventurers’ highest rank? That’s rather unbelievable...”

“Well, that’s true though.”

After Hajime confirmed what Endou said with a serious expression as the truth, Endou sprang up towards Hajime and gripped his shoulders, and in a voice filled with more desperation than before, he began to speak in sorrow.

“Then, please! Please enter the dungeon with me! We must hurry or else everyone will be dead! We need someone with battle potential

even if it is just one person! There's also the possibility that Kentarou and Kondou have died! That's why please help us, Nagumo!"

"W-Wait a sec. What's with you all of a sudden!? I don't know the situation, you know? So what's with the dead thing? And can't Amanogawa somehow do something about it? There's also Commander Meld, so there's no need to worry about another failure like when we faced the Behemoth..."

Hajime perplexedly asked back because even though he usually didn't stand, out Endou wore an expression as if he was truly at his wits' end. And at the moment Endou heard Commander Meld

name, he fell to his knees with a truly dark expression. Next, he muttered with a low, subdued voice.

“... -ad.”

“Hah? I can’t hear you. So, what did you say?”

“... I said they are dead! Commander Meld, Alan-san, and the other Knights are dead! All of the Knights who entered the dungeon are dead! They died to let me escape! Because of me! They are dead! They died!”

“... I see.”

“They died,” Endou said repeatedly like a child throwing a tantrum, and Hajime only replied with two words.

Hajime's class was not a fighting one, so he didn't have much encounter with Commander Meld. However, he remembered that Commander Meld was a good person, and he recalled that Commander Meld believed the "incompetent" him before Hajime fell into the abyss. If it was Hajime who just got out of the abyss and heard of Meld's death, he would have probably just said, "So what?" However, the current him thought it was little regrettable. At the very least, he prayed for their happiness in the next world in his mind.

"So, what happened?"

"That's..."

Still on his knees, Endou tried to

explain the situation to answer Hajime's question, while he hung his head. However, a hoarse voice interrupted him.

"Please continue your conversation inside. After all, you are my guests."

The owner of the voice was a powerful man with a good body build, and had a large scar on his left eye who was around 60 years of age. It was obvious his eye had the ability to perceive the situation, polished for years, and ambition was overflowing from his body.

With the previous receptionist by the man's side, Hajime guessed the man must be the head of this guild branch. And because Endou's wails and shouts made the guild

atmosphere returned to one of high tension similar to the time Hajime's party entered the hall, he thought this was not an appropriate place to have such a talk, and obediently followed the man.

Endou had probably already made such a commotion earlier, and exposed that something had happened to the Hero's group and the Knights. And that was the cause of the strange atmosphere when Hajime's party entered the guild.

The man Hajime thought of as the branch head grab Endou's arm to force him to stand up and lead them to the guild interior without saying anything. Endou was considerably emotionally unstable, and currently had lost all of his

strength.

Because the content would not be something pleasant, Hajime's party moved after the man while expecting the unpleasant.

* * *

"... Demon... race, huh."

Hajime's mutter rang out inside the reception room of Holad branch Adventurer guild. Seated on the sofa before him were the Holad branch's head, Lorr Vauabith, and Endou Kousuke, and seated beside Hajime were Yue, Shia with Tio at Shia's side. Myuu was sitting on Hajime's lap.

Hajime's first response after hearing the situation from Endou

was something Endou had said during his explanation. The talk of how the Hero's party was attacked by the demon race and was in pinch, made Endou and Lorr's put on serious expressions, and the room was filled with an oppressive atmosphere.

...Or so it should be, but the little girl sitting on Hajime's lap was munching on the snacks, and it made her cheeks swell up like a squirrel, so she didn't even notice the serious atmosphere. The conversation between Hajime and the others was slightly difficult for Myuu, and she could feel the uneasy atmosphere. However, Hajime gave her a snack so to divert her attention from being uneasy.

“More importantly! What’s with that!? Who’s that child!? Why is she eating the cake!? Doesn’t she understand the situation!? Everyone might have be dead, you know!”

“Eeek!? Papa!”

Unable to endure Myuu’s existence, who destroyed the mood in the room, Endou stood up and said with an angry voice while pointing at her. Surprised, Myuu raised a small scream and clung to Hajime.

Naturally, bloodlust far above an ordinary person could emit, overflowed from Hajime. Papa would not forgive his daughter’s enemy.

“Bastard... Who are you to snarl at

Myuu, ah? AH? Should I kill you?”

“Eeek!?”

Screaming just like Myuu, Endou dropped into the sofa. Because of what Hajime said, “...Really, Hajime is completely a Papa now,” or “Before, Hajime-san casually said “our child”, right~,” or “In the end, this one wonders whether Master will be able to separate from this child once we arrive at Elizen~,” could be heard only to be ignored by him. It was more important for him to calm the frightened Myuu.

While Hajime calming Myuu down, he leered at trembling Endou trembling after he had collapsed into the sofa. Lorr entered the conversation with an amazed

expression.

“How then, Hajime. I have roughly understood your situation from Ilwa’s letter. You’ve quite the rampage, haven’t you?”

“Well, all of them were just the course of events.”

Although they were not situations that normally appeared as the course of events, Hajime who shrugged his shoulders as though nothing big had happened, made Lorr curve the edge of his lips, finding it amusing.

“From the letter, with the acceptance of you as “Gold” rank, it was written that you want to be accommodated in the best possible

way. I've roughly understood the situation... but to annihilate around 60,000 demonic beasts with just a handful of people, and decimate the underground organization based in Fhuren in just half a day... that is something unbelievable. But for Ilwa to purposely tell me this through a letter... I won't think it is strange if someone said you are actually one of the Demon Lords now."

Lorr's words made Endou opened his eyes wide to show how surprised he was. Even though he thought Hajime must've gotten stronger since he had escaped from the depths of «Orcus Great Dungeon», he thought Hajime was still weaker than himself.

After all, Hajime's class was "Transmutation Master," which was a non-fighting class, and he was also called as "incompetent." Even if someone said he was "Gold" rank, it was just the standard of being an Adventurer in this different world, and couldn't be compared to those summoned here. That's why he thought, at the very least, Hajime should be able to repair the destroyed teleportation circle and become his support in battle.

To begin with, Endou came to the Adventurers' guild to ask high ranked Adventurers to help him in rescuing Kouki's party. Surely even if he could not take them to the dungeon depth, they would at least be able to protect the area around the teleportation circle. And though

there were also stationed knights, they would not do anything before they reported this to the Kingdom, and their level was so low that at most they could do was protect the teleportation circle on 30th floor. He needed Adventurers with at least “Silver” rank to protect the 70th floor’s teleportation circle.

He entered the Adventurer guild with such thoughts and grandly exposed the current situation to those in second floor. He thought he could ask for the Adventurers’ cooperation, for heroes, who were the humanity’s hope, fell into such a predicament along with the annihilation of the Elite Knights. However, in addition to the unexpected request to protect 70th floor’s teleportation circle, made

everyone avert their gazes and at the same time, uneasiness about what would happen to the humanity spreaded.

Noticing the commotion, Loor grabbed Endou by the scruff of his neck and dragged him inside to question him, when the receptionist ran inside with Hajime's status plate.

As such, Endou noticed he had underestimated Hajime's ability and the possibility that Hajime was even more powerful than him made, Endou astonished when he compared the current and past Hajime.

Even though Endou was stiffened due to the shock, Lorr and Hajime's

talk kept advancing.

“Please don’t say such a stupid thing... How could you think we are as weak as the Demon Lords?”

“Hmm, so even Demon Lords are small fries, huh? What confidence... But, if that’s the truth, I want you to receive a commission with Holad branch Adventurer guild’s head as the referral.”

“... Rescuing the heroes, right?”

Endou returned to his senses when he heard the word rescue. Next, he leaned forward and spoke to Hajime.

“Th-That’s it! Nagumo! Come with me and help them! If you are that strong, we can surely save

everyone!”

“...”

Although Endou’s eyes shined because he could see the hope, but Hajime’s reaction was an unfavorable one. He was looking at the distance as though he was thinking of something. Endou naturally had thought Hajime would surely help him to rescue the others, so he was perplexed because there was no prompt answer.

“What’s with you!? Even now, they might be dying, you know! Don’t hesitate! Aren’t we comrades!?”

“... Comrades?”

Hajime, who averted his gaze earlier while thinking of something,

was once again looking back at the heated up Endou with a cold expression. Endou instinctively backed away due to the coldness in Hajime's eyes. He hesitated after recalling Hajime's earlier bloodlust, but he obstinately answered because Hajime was a valuable force that could not be missed.

"Y-Yeah. We are comrades! So it's natural to he—..."

"Don't selfishly make me your comrade. Frankly, I only recognize you as nothing but a human 'from the same world,' no more, no less. You are no different than the others."

"Wh—!? Why... why did you say that..."

Hajime's unexpectedly cold words and leer made Endou confused. Hajime resumed thinking, in other words, he thought of the demerits from rescuing Kouki's party.

Just as Hajime said, he recognized the classmates as nothing more than acquaintances. Until now, he neither thought of using his power to return to the way he was in the past, nor revenge. He was truly disinterested and thought them as trivial things.

However, he could not just bluntly answer with a "NO." As for the reason, he connected that answer to the words Aiko said, "lonely way of life."

Furthermore, Hajime recalled the

conversation under the moonlight. Having been called “incompetent” and “weakest” in this different world, there was the girl who said to Hajime, “I will protect Nagumo-kun.” In the end, Hajime was reckless and disappeared as he fell into the abyss, just like what the girl was uneasy about. She had promised “to protect him” to remove her uneasiness, but that promise could not be accomplished. And somehow, Hajime had frequently recalled the time he was about to fall into the abyss and the girl who outstretched her hand with bitter expression after returning to this town.

“Shirasaki... is she safe?”

Hajime muttered and asked the

confused Endou. Letting out, “Eh?,” a dubious voice because of the sudden question, Endou panickedly began to speak about Kaori since he thought Hajime would not cooperate if he didn’t say anything.

“Y-Yeah. Shirasaki-san is safe. Rather, we would not have survived if not for her. Jyuugo and Yaegashi-san were dying from the first attack... but Shirasaki-san was truly amazing. Her healing magic was unbelievable, rather... she turned ghastly since the day you fell, you know? She trained so hard, so much that we wanted to stop her... and her aura also changed? She somehow looked mature as though she was always thinking of something, and the fluffy atmosphere around her had

disappeared…”

“… I see.”

Hajime only replied as such to the Endou who frantically talked even about the unnecessary things. Thus, Hajime looked at his precious partner who watched him as he scratched his head.

“… If it’s something Hajime wants to do, I’ll follow you to wherever it is.”

“… Yue.”

With affectionate gaze, Yue said so and quietly grasped Hajime’s hand. Hajime returned her grasp, watched her gently, and thanked her.

“M-Me too! I’ll follow Hajime-san to

wherever it is! Hajime-san!”

“Hmph, of course this one will, too. Master.”
“Umm, umm, that’s, Myuu, too!”

Because Hajime and Yue began to create their own world, Shia and Tio panicky asserted. Although she didn’t understand it well, Myuu clung and insisted so because she didn’t want to be left behind.

Before them, Endou said, “Eh? What’s with this harem...,” with an amazed expression to which Hajime responded with a leer, while telling his comrades what he wanted to do.

“Everyone, thank you. Although I don’t want to purposely make

connection between us and the God chosen Heroes... I have someone I'm indebted to. That's why, I thought to at least help. Well, if it's them then they might be able to do something themselves."

Hajime's real intention was not to help Kouki's party. He didn't want to purposely approach either the Heroes or the Mad God who chose them.

However, he thought to at least show his face to Kaori who pushed herself to find him. In addition, he'd help her if she was truly in a pinch. In other words, he had an obligation to Kaori who wanted to protect him and still believed his survival even now.

He didn't even worry about the risk involved. He had fought the four-eyed wolf in Endou's story, and the Chimeras' strength should be below tenth floor of Abyss dungeon, so there was no problem at all.

"E-Excuse me, so, will you go with him?"

"Ah, branch head Lorr. For now, I also want to request something from you..."

"You don't want to be seen unconditionally helping them by the ones above, right?"

"Yes. There's one more thing. I want you lend me a room for Myuu until we return."

"Ah, I don't mind."

Resultantly, Endou who breathed a sigh of relief because Hajime would come with him, was ignored while Hajime continued his conversation with Lorr.

As expected, he could not just take a child into the depth of the dungeon, so he entrusted Myuu to the guild. Although Myuu fiercely resisted, somehow everyone was able to calm her down, and Tio was entrusted with baby-sitting and guarding her. Finally, Hajime's party were able to depart with Endou as their guide.

"Oi, guide us quickly, Endou."

"Uwah, don't kick my butt! Rather, you are changing too much!"

“How noisy. As for the time, a day... No, let’s end this in half a day. Though reluctant, we left Myuu behind, so we need to return quickly. I’m also worried because she’s with that pervert.”

“...You, so you really are her father... To create a harem of beautiful girls... just what has happened to turn that Nagumo into this...”

While dashing towards the depth of the dungeon, Endou muttered, trying to comprehend something from Hajime’s attitude and the surroundings. With such powerful help, Endou’s mind regained some composure. If he had the time to talk, he wanted to use it to run faster since he had confidence in his high agility, but it had been

smashed to pieces. In addition, Endou was praying for his best friends' safety.

Chapter 76 : The Hero's Defeat

* * *

"Uh..."

"Suzu-chan!"

"Suzu!"

With Suzu raising a groan and slowly opening her eyes, Kaori and Eri who were always beside her, called Suzu's name with anxious voices mixed with relief. Suzu spaced out for a while with only her gaze moving around, and finally opened her mouth.

“I-I don’t know this ceiling~.”

“Suzu, I know you like acting, but wouldn’t it be better if you didn’t say something like that at time like this?”

She should be thirsty. However, Suzu desperately said so with hoarse voice, which made Shizuku retorted in a half-amazed, half-praising tone when she heard her. Afterwards, Suzu moistened her throat using the water from the leather flask by her side.

With lovely sound of gulping, Suzu, who sated her thirst, said, “I’m revived! Literally!,” words that couldn’t be taken as a joke, and she tried her best to stand up with Kaori and Eri supporting her. The class’s

moodmaker who regained her consciousness from a critical condition, radiated a cheerful atmosphere which made the classmates who had been depressed until now show smiles.

However, the bright atmosphere was very contrary to Suzu's complexion. She was exhausted and suffered blood loss. With a pale face and thin lines below her eyes just like a bear's, her smile looked miserable. Some parts of her body were pierced, but it was unmistakably her "strength" to be able to smile as soon as she got up. Shizuku and Kaori watched her with respect.

"Suzu-chan. It's okay for you to rest some more. After all, your blood

shouldn't have been replenished yet, even if your wounds have recovered..."

"U~n, so that's why I feel dizzy~. That bastard~, to pierce the beautiful Suzu... even though, "Can I penetrate you now?," is better to be said in bed!"

"Suzu! That's vulgar! Be more prudent!"

Suzu said while hatefully gazing at empty space, and Eri scolded Suzu with flushed cheeks. Some of the male students inadvertently, "Bff!?," but averted their gazes due to Shizuku's glare.

"Suzu, thank God you woke up. We were worried, you know?"

“Yo, are you really okay? Isn’t your face completely pale?”

Because Suzu suddenly caused a commotion after she woke up, Kouki and Ryuutarou approached her. While being weakened for a period of time as an effect from using “Limit Break,” Kouki became depressed because they were severely beaten. However, he seemed to have recovered somehow since a moderate amount of time had passed after they had retreated and hid where they currently were.

“Morning~, Kouki-kun, Ryuutarou-kun! Looks like we somehow got away, huh? Umm, is everyone saf– … Wait, one is missing…”

“Yeah, it’s Endou. He retreated

ahead alone. We think he should be able to break through the floors alone by hiding himself…”

After greeting Kouki and Ryuutarou with a smile, Suzu noticed one person was missing from the surrounding classmates. Suzu had lost her consciousness in the midst of battle, so Kouki and the others answered her doubt while they explained the current situation.

Incidentally, Kondou and Saitou had been de-petrified, woke up earlier than Suzu, and had already been debriefed of the situation.

“I see, looks like a lot of time had passed since Suzu fainted… Ah, that’s right. Kaorin, thanks! Kaorin has become Suzu’s life benefactor!”

“Suzu-chan, it’s my duty to heal everyone. So don’t exaggerate it by calling me your life benefactor because it was a natural thing for me to do.”

“Heh~, even stoic Kaorin is wonderful! Shall we get married?”

“Suzu... it’s eerie if you say that with pale face. For now, shouldn’t you rest some more?”

Suzu was scolded by Eri while she was clinging to Kaori. If she over did it, Shizuku would physically stop her. It was the usual way of things. Even the classmates who wondered whether they’d be able to survive and return to surface again, gradually regained their composure thanks to Suzu and the girls’

conversation that didn't mind their defeat.

However, the atmosphere which was starting to turn bright was douse with water by a person who always ruin the ambience.

"...What are you grinning about? We almost died, you know? Moreover, our situation hasn't changed even now! Think of how we can get out of here if you have time to joke around!"

The one who shouted while glaring at Suzu was Kondou Reiichi. And though he didn't express it, Saitou Yoshiki by his side also watched her with criticizing gaze.

"Oi, Kondou. Can you not say such

a thing? Suzu only did this to change the moo—…”

“Shut up! It’s not like you can say anything to me! After all, you lost! I almost died! Shit! What a Hero you are!”

Although Kouki tried to admonish Kondou due to his remark, Kondou suddenly burst like fire that got poured with oil and began to criticize Kouki.

“Bastard… Thanks to whom do you think we could retreat, huh? We could do that because Kouki opened a path for us!”

“To begin with, there’s no need for us to retreat if he wins! More importantly, we obviously had our

chance. It would have been all right for us to receive the invitation from Demon Race and defeat them later! But, you selfishly started the fight! Everything is your fault! This is your responsibility!”

This time, Ryuutarou began to admonish such a Kondou. Kondou stood up and confronted Ryuurarou. Sympathizing with Kondou, Saitou and Nakano also stood up and faced Ryuutarou.

“Ryuutarou, I am okay... I’ll accept my responsibility, Kondou. We won’t lose this time! We already understood the characteristics of the demonic beasts, and we won’t get attacked by surprise again. So, we will absolutely win this time!”

Although Kouki made a gesture where he clasped his clenched fist, Saitou muttered with darkened eyes.

“... But, you could not win even with “Limit Break.”

“Th-That’s... i-it’ll be okay now!”

“Why?”

“I’ll use “Divine Might” and attack the Demon Race woman from the beginning. That’s why, if everyone could cover me...”

“But, won’t she know a troublesome attack is coming with such a long chant? Even our enemies will have their own plans, right? Besides, we don’t know if those were all of the demonic beasts she has.”

Even if Kouki said it'd be okay, Kondou and gang complained while beginning to doubt Kouki's ability, and were looking at him with doubtful eyes. With this, even though Kouki could not help but take responsibility to make sure they win. They would not calm down because of the fact that they had almost died as a result of the enemies' unbelievable strength and number.

The main cause for them to heat up were because Ryuutarou had a low angry point while Kondou and gang were being belligerent by objecting constantly. Gradually, Ayako, Yoshino, and Nomura tried to stop their quarrel, but a dangerous mood began to drift around.

As such, Ryuutarou began to ready his fists while Kondou readied his spear. Tension immediately filled their location. Kouki shouted, Ryuutarou!, and grip his shoulder to stop him. However, Ryuutarou could not be stopped and veins popped on his head while glaring at Kondou. Even Kondou and gang were partly obstinate about it.

“Everyone, please calm down! No matter what you say, we can only bet on Kouki to survive! We must defeat the Demon Race woman even if Kouki was at the time limit of his “Limit Break.” We can only do that since she won’t let us escape. You understand that, right?”

Shizuku entered between them and frantically tried to persuade them to

calm down, but it didn't work either. Swaying while standing, Suzu seemed to not want to hear what Kondou said even if he apologized. Finally, Kaori thought she needed to restrain everyone and began to prepare her restraining magic... when they heard something.

"Grrrrr..."

"""" !?""""

A growl. A growl so familiar, so low that came from the bottom of abdomen. The appearances of Chimeras and the four-red-eyed wolves crossed their minds. The dangerous mood immediately dissipated and everyone stiffened. Even the smallest breathing seemed

to resound, and their breathing became smaller. Their gazes turned towards the passage camouflaged as a wall before them.

Whoosh! Fwiiish, Whooosh! Fwuuush!

Sounds of scratching and rough nasal breathing could be heard from the wall. Someone was gulping. Even trace of their smells should've been erased by Endou, so the demonic beasts shouldn't be able to perceive that Kouki's party were inside no matter how strong they were. Even though they thought so, they were tensed and unpleasant sweats flowed.

Some time was still needed before they completely recovered. Suzu

was not in condition to fight, Kaori and Ayako had used too much magic to heal the others and had hardly recovered. The vanguard group were almost fully recovered, but the magic users in the rear group only had recovered half of their magic power. The healing potions they had also been exhausted, so they still need to wait for sometimes to recover at the earliest.

They could not overlook the holes in terms of roles created by Kaori and Ayako as the healers and the barrier user, Suzu. That's why Kouki's party were hoping they would not be found out now as they watched the wall separating the outside and the hidden room.

The demonic beasts wandered outside for a while, but their presences gradually began to fade before long. Thus, silence returned once again. Even so, everyone was standing still for a while, and breathed great sighs of relief when they knew the demonic beasts had completely disappeared; some of them crumpled on the spot. The extreme tension made their sweats overflow like a flood.

"...We'll be found out if we keep making a commotion. That's why, please just calm down and recover for now."

"Y-Yeah..."

"Y-You are right..."

Shizuku wiped the sweat off her cheek which fell and created weird dripping sound. Kondou and the others replied while stammering and withdrew their arms. It was as though they got doused by cold water.

Having thought the crisis was through, everyone relaxed... and at that moment,

“ROOOOOOARRRRR!!!”

BOOOM!!!

The wall separating the hidden room and the outside was crushed to pieces along with a tremendous roar.

“Uwah!?”

“Kyaaaa!!”

The wall’s fragments were blown like bullets due to the impact into the hidden room, and hit Kondou and Yoshino who were in its trajectory. The two spontaneously fell flat on their butts as they raised screams.

In the next moment, before the dumbfounded Kouki’s party were the incoming blurred spaces whom they still didn’t want to meet.

“Prepare to fight!”

“Damn it! How did they find us!”

While ordering so, Kouki immediately drew and slashed the Chimeras with the Holy Sword. They didn’t move because they

would lose sight of the enemies if they distanced themselves from them. As he cursed, Ryuutarou positioned himself before the passage connected to the outside, and tried to prevent the demonic beasts from invading any more than this.

However,

“RooOOoAR!!”
“GROoowwwWL!!”

A Brutal-look-alike immediately hurled its steel-like body like a cannonball into the room. Thus, it grappled into Ryuutarou with tremendous momentum and pushed him down.

Using that chance, tens of black

cats dashed into the room and immediately fired tens of tentacles. Fired like a barrage, they mercilessly attacked Kondou and the others who remained on their spots. And though Kondou and the others immediately readied their weapons, the tentacles were too much in number and would skewer them as-is.
?????????? ??

“——”Heaven Interruption”!”
“——”Heaven Interruption”!”

15 shields of light slantly appeared in the space before Kondou and the others and managed to deviate the trajectories of the attacks. To be capable of activating the shields even with such short chants would make anyone marveled. Ten of the

shields were Suzu's, while the other five were Kaori's.

However, even though they immediately cast them, Suzu's physical condition was still in a bad shape while Kaori's magic power was still exhausted. Those facts affected the strenght of the shields.

Whiiiish! Fwooosh! Whiiiish! Fwooosh! Whiiiish! Fwooosh!

They should've been able to change the trajectories and endure the impact, but vigorous attacks from the tentacles broke the shields one after another. Thus, several of the tentacles' trajectories could not be changed by the crushed shields and attacked Nakano and Saitou. The two immediately bend their bodies.

Since both were in the rear group, their physical strength weren't that high. Because of that, even though they avoided mortal wound, Nakano shoulder and Saitou's thigh were gouged, and they raised screams as they were thrown to the ground.

"Shinji! Yoshiki! Shit! Daisuke, help them!"

"... Ah, of course."

Always brooding over something since they escaped into the hidden room, Hiyama did not pay much attention to what Kondou said. However, the situation didn't let him say anything otherwise, so he dragged the wounded Nakano and Saitou towards Suzu's side. Even though her physical condition was

not good, the area around Suzu, whose magic power still had a lot remaining, was the safest. Besides, they would be easily healed by Kaori at Suzu's side.

"Kuh, Kouki! Use "Limit Break" and get outside! We will do something about these guys inside this room!"

"But, Suzu and the others cannot move..."

"We will face them as-is! Please! Break through them and kill the Demon Race woman!"

"Kouki! Leave this place to us! I absolutely won't let them die!"

"...Okay! I will leave this place to you! "Limit Break"!"

After thinking about Shizuku and Ryuutarou's words for a moment, he thought it was certainly the only way to break through this situation. With a resolute expression, Kouki activated "Limit Break" for the second time today. The reason "Limit Break" must not be used for more than once a day was because it put considerable burden into the body. That's why, "Limit Break" which usually had an eight minute limit, but it might be shorter now. Expecting that, Kouki would ignore the others and only concentrate on defeating the Demon Race woman, he went out of the hidden room.

Going out of the room into the huge octagonal room, before Kouki's eyes were a large amount of demonic beasts. And within the

stationary demonic beasts stood the Demon Race woman looking at him with cold eyes, and a white crow on her shoulder. The inside of Kouki's mind was boiling with a sense of mission to save his comrades and anger that they were put into such a predicament. Thus, he glared straight at the Demon Race woman.

"Hmph, you made me waste too much time. I also have other missions too..."

"Shut up! I will surely defeat you! Prepare yourself!"

Declaring so, Kouki used short chant, and magic power was immediately sent into the Holy Sword. "Divine Might" would normally reach the Demon Race

woman, but even so, he used the chant omission version of “Divine Might” since he believed it would be able to open a path for him.

However, the Demon Race woman showed a smile before the Holy Sword, whose radiance increased, and she ordered the Brutal-look-alike standing by near her to drag something from the back.

Kouki put a dubious expression at first which then turned into an aghast expression when he saw that “something.” He instinctively lowered the Holy Sword with eyes wide opened and called his name with a trembling voice.

“... M-Meld-san?”

That's right, there was the dying Meld whose limbs were crushed and whole body drenched in blood being dragged by the Brutal-look-alike by the scruff of his neck. With a glance, his whole body was limp and seemed to have died, but sometimes small groans arose and demonstrated that he was alive.

"Y-You! Let go of Meld-san—!?"

Kouki was enraged because of Meld's state, and in a split moment, he tried to rush towards the Demon Race woman, losing himself. Suddenly, a huge shadow shrouded over Kouki as though it had been waiting for such exquisite timing. Hah, before Kouki noticed it and turned his gaze, there was the spectacle's wall-like fist

approaching him with tremendous momentum that made even the air exploded.

BaAAaaM!!!

Although Kouki spontaneously used his left arm to guard, the fist swung with tremendous force easily crushed his guard, and Kouki's left arm and body received a powerful impact. Kouki flew towards a wall and crashed into it with tremendous speed incomparable to being run over by a dump truck. The wall behind him was crushed radically by the impact.

"GaaAH!"

Because of the impact he had taken, Kouki air was released from his

lungs, and he slipped down from the wall, in all fours. Kouki desperately tried to support his body using his healthy right arm, but a lot of blood flowed from his mouth. The earlier attack had most likely damaged his organs. He might have died instantly if it wasn't for the skill derived from "Physical Resistance," "Mitigation of Impact."

In addition, because of a concussion to his head, he desperately tried to understand the situation even with an unfocused gaze. Then, he saw it. A three meter, huge demonic beast was in the location where Kouki was before, with its fist thrusted.

It had a horse-like head where fangs grew, four thick heavy arms

growing from its muscular body, and its lower half was that of a monstrous gorilla. Glaring at Kouki with bloodshot eyes, steam gushed out from the long horse-like mouth every time it breathed. Its atmosphere was obviously different from the demonic beasts he had faced until now.

The horsehead withdrew its fist and immediately rushed out while firing a dense bloodlust to the still unable-to-stand Kouki mercilessly. Jumping only a little away from the place where Kouki was crouching, it swung its fist down with tremendous momentum towards Kouki. Because of the warning from his instincts, Kouki laid on the ground and rolled over, desperately getting out of his location.

KABOOOM!!!

Immediately, the horsehead's fist pierced the ground and at the same time, a reddish black ripple extended on the ground along with a roar. The destruction was just like an explosion. This was the horsehead's peculiar magic, "Magic Shock Wave." It was an ability to convert magic power into a shockwave. However, as simple as it might be, it was an immensely powerful peculiar magic.

Due to the skill derived from "Physical Resistance," "Recovery Rate Increased," Kouki somehow recovered from his head concussion. He desperately stood up and readied the Holy Sword. At that time, the horsehead had

already approached before him and swung its fist once again.

With a crushed left arm, Kouki used Holy Sword as a shield and the impact received by his right arm blew him away again. Afterwards, even though Kouki managed to avoid a mortal wound, the four arms sent out “Magic Shock Wave” with all of their might, and he, whose movement had slowed down due to the damage from the first impact, couldn’t counter attack at all.

“Kuuu! What’s with this thing’s strength! Even though I should be strengthened by “Limit Break”!”

“RUUUUAAAA!!”

With pained expression, Kouki was frustrated because the horsehead demonic beast could overpower him who was under “Limit Break,” and he went for a counterattack, prepared for damages while thinking he couldn’t let it continue.

However...

THUD!

“Kh!?”

Right before he began, the limit of Kouki’s “Limit Break” had arrived, and power suddenly left him. Because he used it twice in such a short time, he was attacked by powerlessness incomparable to what he felt earlier, and he fell on his knee with no power entering his

legs.

The horsehead didn't miss that chance. With him suddenly losing his power and balance, Kouki was in a hopeless situation as the horsehead's fist, bam!, hit his abdomen with a sound of impact.

"GAaAH!"

Splurting blood, Kouki's body was made into ‹ shape, blown away, and crashed into the wall once again. Being weakened thanks to the side effect of "Limit Break," Kouki's consciousness was drifting away. Being mortally injured, he fell down without even twitching. Rather, it was strange for him not to die instantly in his current state. Perhaps the horsehead was taking it

easy so he wouldn't.

The horsehead approached Kouki and lifted him by grabbing the back of his neck. The unconscious and completely powerless Kouki was hung by the horsehead to show his state to the Demon Race woman. The Demon Race woman nodded in satisfaction and ordered the demonic beasts that rushed into the hidden room to withdraw.

After a while, Shizuku and the others went out with full caution.Their expressions were dyed in despair when they saw the powerless Kouki being lifted by the huge horse-headed demonic beast they had never seen before.

Chapter 77 : Accompanied By A Red Thunder

* * *

“It’s a lie... right? How can Kouki... lose?”

“N-No way...”

“N-No... w-why...”

Coming out from the hidden room, Kouki’s comrades were bewildered in seeing him being hung, and they uttered incoherent words. Even Shizuku, Kaori, and Suzu were speechless. Towards the classmates

who had lost their fighting spirit, the Demon Race woman spoke with a cold attitude.

“Hmm, it looks like I’ll be able to catch you guys easily. I... have underestimated you brats, but it looks like it’ll work out just fine.”

With a pale expression, Shizuku asked the Demon Race woman with courageous tone.

“... What did you do?”

“Nn? It’s this, you know this.”

After replying to the question, the Demon Race woman turned her gaze towards Commander Meld who was gripped by a Brutal-look-alike even now. Following her gaze, Shizuku came to understand the

moment she saw the dying Commander Meld. Commander Meld was used to divert Kouki's attention. If his acquaintance was caught and was dying, Kouki would surely react to it. Furthermore, he would've considerably lost his composure.

The Demon Race woman had most likely to understood Kouki's straight forward character from their previous fight. Thus, using Chimera's peculiar ability, she hid a strong demonic beast who aimed at the moment Kouki jumped in anger.

"... So? What do you want from us? You must want something since you're purposely letting us live and started to converse with us, right?"

“Ah, as expected, you’re the one who can understand situation the best. What, it’s not such a special conversation. When I saw you guys earlier, I thought to once again invite you guys. Look, before, it was this Hero-kun who selfishly decided everything, right? And, there are also excellent people among you, so I want ask you again. So? What do you think?”

Some people reacted to the Demon Race woman’s words. Because of that, Shizuku narrowed her eyes and questioned the woman again.

“... What about Kouki?”

“Fufu, what a fast learner... Sorry, but I can’t let Hero-kun alive. He didn’t want to come to our side, so

it's impossible to persuade him, right? After all, he is the self-contained type. That's why I don't have any reason to keep such a dangerous creature alive."

"... Isn't that the same with us?"

"Of course; why did you think I let you live even though I know it'll only make me anxious of my back?"

"Haven't you thought that we might joined now and betray you later?"

"Naturally, I have thought that. That's why I'll make you wear collars. Ah, there's no need to worry, it's only make you unable to rebel against us. No one will be deprived of their freedoms."

"That's just like slaves with high

degree of freedom. What you mean is we will keep our free will, but we won't be able to harm you."

"That's right. It helps me that you're quick to understand. Also, it's good that this conversation is going somewhere until the one with Hero-kun."

Although the classmates were silently listening to the conversation between Shizuku and the Demon Race, they were also looking at each other with fear-stricken eyes and full of worries. If they did not accept the invitation from Demon Race, then nine out of ten they would be killed by the demonic beasts that were even difficult for Kouki to defeat, but they would not be able to fight

against Demon Race again if they sided with Demon Race and wore the collar.

In other words, they would no longer be “God’s Apostles.” If it turned to that, would Church of the Saints whom they had been summoned to protect became useless... and, would it be possible for them to return to their original world...

No matter what option they chose, they could not see a bright future. However...

“I-I think we should accept that person’s invitation!”

Among the silent crowd, Eri unexpectedly desperately spoke

while trembling. Thus, the classmates opened their eyes wide in surprise, and carefully paid attention to her. To such an Eri, Ryuutarou shouted back with face red in anger.

“Eri, you! So, you are going to abandon Kouki!”

“Hih!?”

“Ryuutarou, please calm down! Eri, why do you think so?”

Ryuutarou’s attitude made Eri frightened, and she stepped back as a result. However, Shizuku admonished Ryuutarou and was somehow able to stop him. Thus, Eri took a deep breath and spoke her mind with tightly clenched fists.

“I-I just... don’t want everyone to die... Even I don’t know... what to do with Kouki-kun... ugh, gulp...”

Eri spun her words with all of her might with tearing streaming down her eyes. Seeing her, the other party members’ hearts were shaken. Thus, one person who agreed with Eri appeared.

“I also agree with Nakamura. Our lost has already been decided; between annihilation and survival, there’s no need to hesitate, right?”

“Hiyama... you mean, you don’t care what happen to Kouki, huh? Huh?”

“Then, Sakagami, are you trying to do double suicide with Kouki who could not fight anymore? And with

all of us involved?”

“That’s not it! As if I’d do that!”

“Then please shut your mouth if you don’t have any alternative. Right now, it should take precedence on how to survive by ourselves.”

With Hiyama’s remark, the atmosphere turned into one where it looked like it was necessary for them to accept the invitation. And just like what Hiyama said, they only had one choice if they wanted to survive.

However, they could not just choose that since they felt guilty, thinking, ‘Is it really okay for us to survive while Kouki gets killed? It was as

though they were boldly sacrificing Kouki for their survival.

To their dilemma, the Demon Race woman made another proposal with such perfect timing.

“Hmmm, if you guys are that worried about Hero-kun... shall I keep him alive? Naturally, a collar with stronger effect than yours will be put on him. But, I want all of you to side with Demon Race first.”

Shizuku secretly clicked her tongue when she heard the proposal. It was because she had guessed since the beginning that the Demon Race woman would propose it. It was strange for Kouki to be kept alive if she had already decided to kill him. The woman only had to kill him if

there was no need for discussion after all.

That's why by not killing him and keeping him alive were all for this moment. The Demon Race woman had likely acknowledged that Kouki and the others were useful after the last fight. However, she was convinced she could not make Kouki waver even through talking. But the others didn't know of that. So, she planned to draw in the others aside from Kouki.

First, she did not kill Kouki to not raise the animosity of the others. Second, she told them to make a choice while she cornered them between choice of death or survival. Third, she guided them to think "if we do that," and she chose that

time to erase the problem from their thought.

Actually, by making the best use of Kouki, the atmosphere changed to one where they thought it'd be okay to side with Demon Race if they survive. Though in reality, they didn't have any guarantee Kouki would be kept alive. Even if they regretted if he was killed after this, they could no longer act against the Demon Race.

Shizuku noticed that, but she kept silent as she told herself they currently could do nothing but to side with Demon Race if they want to survive. There should be a way to save Kouki as long as they were alive.

There were huge merits for the Demon Race woman if she got her hand on Shizuku and the others. First, needless to say, it'll give an impact to the human's side. After all, the "God's Apostles" who were humanity's hope are siding with Demon Race. That impact... no, it was much more like despair will be a huge advantage to the Demon Race.

Second, she would get new battle force. Having come to «Orcus Great Dungeon», the Demon Race woman's real purpose was to conquer the dungeon and bring back the power inside. Though up until now, it was at the level where she could easily sweep the floor with the demonic beasts she had on hand, but it couldn't be said that

she'd be able to keep it up. It would be a good thing to obtain Shizuku and the others as fighting force to replenish the demonic beasts killed by Kouki's party.

If this keeps up, she would obtain Shizuku and the others. The Demon Race woman floated a faint smile as she realized the mood.

However, her smile was immediately erased by the pained voice that suddenly rang out.

"E-Everyone... this is bad... please run away..."

"Kouki!"

"Kouki-kun!"

"Amanogawa!"

The voice's source was the hanged Kouki. All of his comrades' gazes turned to him.

"... Don't believe her... she killed... Alan-san and the other knights... don't... be fooled... you'll be used as slaves... to fight humans... so run away... I am... okay... just... escape by yourself..."

With feeble breathing, Kouki told the danger of the deal and insisted for them to leave him and bet on running away, which once again shook the hearts of the classmates.

"...In this situation, just how many do you think will survive? Just look at the reality already! We already lost! Even the knights... were killed! So there's no other choice! We can

do nothing but accepting the invitation if we want to survive!"

Hiyama's angry voice rang out. He angrily looked at Kouki who still didn't come to terms with the situation. Hiyama certainly wanted to survive. At worst, he would make sure Kaori and himself survive even if the others didn't. However, the possibility of doing that if he bet on escaping would be too low.

If he went to the Demon Race side, there's enough possibility of being promoted o an important position if he displayed his usefulness, and he'd be able to obtain Kaori. Naturally, he'd limit her freedom using the collar. Hiyama did not care whether she had free will or not. He'd be satisfied as long as he

made Kaori his.

Because of Hiyama's angry voice, the others were charmed by the more certain and nearer future.

At that moment, a pained but powerful voice rang inside the room. Even though it was a small voice, it resounded well to others. It was a voice that had encouraged them many times in the battlefields. The person calmly judged any kind of situations, said words without any hesitation, and a model for them who also had a reliable back. For everyone, he was like a big brother and even a father they were fond of. Meld's voice rang out.

"Guh... you guys... you only need to think on how to survive! ... Advance

on the path you believed in! ... I am sorry involving you... to our war... Even though the time I spent with you isn't that long... I've regretted involving you... That's why, live and return to your world... no need to worry about human race... In the first place... this war should be fought by the human in this world!"

Meld's words weren't words of a Herrlicht Kingdom's Commanding Knight. They were words of a man, Meld Loginz, his true feelings as he cast aside his position. He exposed his feelings because he realized here would be the end for him.

Kouki and the others had their eyes wide opened while muttering Meld's name and Meld shook off the Brutal-look-alike while a light

shone from his whole body. Then, he immediately grappled the Demon Race woman.

“You demon... let’s die together!”

“... That is... hee~, self-destruction? How brave. I can say I don’t hate it.”

“Shut it!”

The light wrapping Meld was similar to Kouki’s “Limit Break” in a glance while magic power gushed out of his body. However, it was actually not from his body but the crystal hanging on his neck.

Seeing that, the Demon Race woman instantly saw through his personality and satisfyingly praised him.

The crystal's name was "Last Loyalty," an evil tool to self-destruct just like the Demon Race woman said. Someone with high position in the Kingdom and Church of the Saints naturally carried important information with him. And because there's magic capable of reading one's memory in dark attributed magic, that person would be forced to carry the crystal when he went to the frontline. It would be used in time of emergence so the memory could not be read, along with the intention of involving the enemy with the self-destruction.

Meld's last attack that risked his life made Kouki's party screamed out his name. However, unlike them, the Demon Race woman was still calm even though she'd be

swallowed by the explosion and die.

Thus the “Last Loyalty” Meld carried increased its shine further, and one sentence was muttered right before it activated.

“Devour it, Absod.”

Immediately, after the Demon Race woman’s voice rang out, the “Last Loyalty” on its limit let out tremendous lights, and lost its shine.

“Wh-!? What’s happen!”

If one looked carefully, the overflowing lights were flowing into a certain direction. Meld frantically moved only his gaze towards that direction while still pinning the Demon Race woman, and there was

the six-legged turtle shaped demonic beast whose opened mouth was inhaling the lights wrapping Meld.

The six-legged turtle demonic beast was called Absod. Its peculiar magic was “Magic Storage.” It was a skill to freely take and stock magic inside its body. On the other hand, it could not use the stored magic if more than one magic if it took different elements. It only had the ability of letting out the magic again by compressing it from its mouth. However, the storage could even store high-ranked magic. It was a natural enemy for people who fight using magic.

The light wrapping Meld from “Last Loyalty” rapidly lost, and it

exhausted all its powers and became a normal crystal. Suddenly, an impact from an attack hit Meld who was flabbergasted because his last struggle had been obstructed in an unexpected way, but the impact wasn't that strong. What is it?, Meld looked down towards his abdomen where the impact came from.

A reddish brown blade could be seen. Accurately, a blade of sand had pierced through Meld's abdomen from his back. The blade piercing him from behind had blood dripping at the tip.

"... Meld-san!"

Kouki shouted Meld's name without minding his vomited blood.

Meld reacted to his call and the gaze on his abdomen shifted to Kouki. He then frowned he moved his mouth to say, “Sorry,” while revealing a mortified smile.

Immediately, the sand blade swung horizontally and Meld was blown away. Just like a powerless doll, thud!, he was thrown to the ground. The pool of blood spread little by little. Anyone see it would think of it as a mortal wound. It was already a miracle he was capable of moving while covered in wounds, but everyone knew that this time it was the true end.

Even though she understood she would not make it in time, Kaori immediately used ranged recovery magic on Meld. Although the

amount of bleeding had slightly decreased, Kaori could not block Meld's wound since she herself hardly have any magic power.

"Uu, please! Be healed!"

Even as she fell to her knee due to the severe exhaustion from magic power depletion, Kaori desperately continued using healing magic.

"I never thought he'd be able to stand up and pinned me with such wounds. As expected of the Kingdom's Knight Leader. He's worthy of praise. However, this is the end... this'll be your last. So, what do you think?"

The Demon Race woman glared at Kouki and the others as she swung

the sand blade dyed in red. Seeing someone close to them dying once again, everyone, except some, were trembling. Even if they didn't want to admit it, they'd be the next to die if they did not accept the Demon Race woman's proposal.

Representing the others, Hiyama was about to say they accept the proposal. However, at that time,

"... -me."

Kouki, who powerlessly tried to escape from being hung by the horsehead, muttered something with a small voice. Even though he shouldn't be able to create any miracle since he covered in wounds, Hiyama swallowed his words. He somehow could not ignore the

pressure coming from Kouki.

“Ha? What did you say? So, you want to die.”

The Demon Race woman heard Kouki’s mutter, she snorted, and asked him thinking it was just another rave. Kouki raised his cast down gaze, and his straight glare pierced the Demon Race woman.

The Demon Race woman instinctively held her breath when she saw Kouki’s glare. After all, the color of his irises had changed to silvery white as it shone. Instinctively backing away due to an unknown pressure, she ordered the horsehead according to the warning her instinct was telling her. She instinctively realized it was not

the time to think about the advantage and disadvantage of gaining Shizuku and the others.

“Ahatd! Kill him!”

“RoOoOoAaR!!”

The horsehead nameded Ahatd faithfully executed the Demon Race woman’s order. It tried to crush the suspended Kouki’s sides using two fists equipped with “Magic Shock Wave.”

However, at that moment,

CLiiIIInnNG!!

Tremendous light overflowed from Kouki. It became a torrent and rose into the ceiling just like a tornado. Next, Kouki swung his right fist

towards Ahatd's arm that was grabbing onto him, SNaaaAAAAP!, and the arm was easily crushed.

"ROooOOAR!!"

With a roar different from a while ago, Ahatd inadvertently dropped Kouki, and Kouki moved to make a roundhouse kick as though he could not feel his injury.

ThUuUumpP!!

Cannon-like impact sound rang when the kick hit, Ahatd's huge body was bent into < and was blown towards the wall behind with an extraordinary momentum. Ahatd, who was crushed into the wall accompanied with a thunderous roar, could not move well its body

thanks to the impact, desperately trying to slip out of the wall but resulted in nothing.

With a swaying body, Kouki picked up the dropped Holy Sword and glared at the Demon Race woman with a piercing gaze that could almost kill. At the same time, similar torrent that of a tonado rose and began to envelope Kouki's body.

A skill derived from "Limit Break," "Supreme Break." If the normal "Limit Break" increased the basic states by three times within the time limit, "Supreme Break" was higher skill, and basic stats were multiplied by five. However, he had to use limit break to now forcibly dragged out his power. That's why

the current Kouki only had 30 seconds until the limit. The effective time had been cut greatly because of the side effect.

However, without minding that, Kouki rushed towards the Demon Race woman in anger. The only thing in his mind was to beat Meld's enemy. Only revenge.

The Demon Race woman raised a panicked expression and ordered the surrounding demonic beasts to attack Kouki. Chimeras were sneaked attacking, the black cats were firing their tentacles, and the Brutal-look-alike swung their maces. However, Kouki ignored those demonic beasts. Without swinging Holy Sword, he kept advancing, and raised angry cry

towards where the Demon Race woman was.

“Bitch-! How dare you do that to Meld-san-!!”

“Tch!”

Kouki unhesitatingly swung down the Holy Sword that was held in upper stance. The Demon Race woman clicked her tongue and she immediately densified the sand into a shield... but cladded in torrent of light, the Holy Sword easily cut through the shield and slashed the Demon Race woman behind it.

Although she was not cut in two; she backed away and created the sand shield, the Demon Race woman had a deeply cut diagonally

on her body, and blown backward, spraying blood.

Her back crashed into the wall behind, the Demon Race woman skidded down from the crushed wall, and Kouki approached her as he shook of the blood off the Holy Sword.

“What luck... to have the situation reversed just like this... It’s as if I am looking at a cheap drama.”

Having the table reversed thanks to him awakening his hidden power due to him being in a pinch, made the Demon Race woman say sarcastic words while her wandering gaze was looking at the approaching Kouki in resignation.

Even though the white crow on her side activated its peculiar magic, her wound was too deep that it could not be healed immediately, and Kouki won't give her such a time either. It was a true checkmate, and the Demon Race woman endured the severe pain, moved her right hand, and took out a locket pendant from her breast pocket.

Seeing that, Kouki sharpened his expression, thinking it was the same self-destruction tool similar to the one Meld used, and he suddenly dashed out. Regardless of the Demon Race woman's death, he could not let the explosion swallow his comrades. That's why, I will defeat her before it activates! He attacked to stop her.

However...

“I am sorry... I am going to die before you... I love you, Mikhail...”

Looking at the locket pendant in her hand dearly, the Demon Race woman muttered, which made Kouki inadvertently stopped the Holy Sword. Due to the attack not being delivered, the Demon Race woman dubiously raised her face and she noticed the Holy Sword had stopped just a few millimeters overhead.

Kouki expression was aghast as he looked down at the Demon Race woman with wide-open eyes. His eyes expressed, but when he noticed something, it generated fear and hesitation. Seeing his eyes, the

Demon Race woman realized the thing that made him stopped his sword and watched him with a condemning gaze. Her gaze made Kouki shaken further.

“... I am amazed... Did you notice it only now? That you are going to kill a ‘person.’?”

“Kh!?”

That’s right, for Kouki, the Demon Race was a cruel and cowardly higher ranked demonic beasts. It also meant they were recognized as existences evolved from demonic beasts, that was what the Ishtar had taught him about the Demon Race. Actually, they were recognized as such because they were accompanied by the demonic

beasts, their slaves. However, just like a normal human, they love and loved, desperately tried to survive for the sake of something. But Kouki never thought he was going to fight “people.” In a way, it could be said he unconsciously did not want to think so...

The recognition was overturned when the Demon Race woman dearly called the name of her loved person. Whether he liked it or not, the one he was fighting was not a demonic beast. He noticed she was in truth a “person” just like him. He recognized what he was trying to do was “murder.”

“Surely, you did not admit us as “people”... What arrogance.”

“N-No… I, I didn’t know…”

“Hah, isn’t it you “did not try to know”?”

“I, I…”

“See? So, what’s wrong? After all, what you’re doing is not fighting but “hunting,” right? There’s one animal before you here, you know? Even though you have thought like that until now…”

“… L-let’s just talk… surely if we talk…”

Kouki said as he lowered Holy Sword. Demon Race woman looked at him with pure scorn, and she shouted an order instead of answering him.

“Ahatd! Aim at the swordswoman! The others, attack!”

Having recovered from the impact, Ahatd approached Shizuku with tremendous momentum, exactly what the Demon Race woman had ordered. Within Kouki’s party, although her charisma to lead people could not be compared to him, to excel in making calm judgement of the situation made her the most troublesome enemy, so Shizuku was the first to be targeted.

The others demonic beasts also began attacking the other party members. Rather than the merits gained by making them betray their allies with attached collars, she judged, because of his last attack, it

was necessary to kill Kouki. The Demon Race woman felt Kouki's latest attack was a threat.

"Wh-, why!"

"You're a boy without any self-awareness... we are at "war!" You who possessed huge power with immature mind is too dangerous! You are going to die here no matter what! Look, your comrades will be annihilated if you don't help them!"

Kouki shouted at the Demon Race woman who ignored his suggestion, but the woman didn't care at all.

Next, Kouki turned around because of the woman's words, and at the same time, Shizuku was blown away and she crashed into the

ground. Ahatd was already a monster that had already far surpassed the strong demonic beasts. It overpowered Kouki who was using “Limit Break” even if it was just a surprise attack. So, Shizuku should not be able to fight it by herself.

Kouki turned pale and used the power from “Supreme Break” to instantly move between Ahatd and Shizuku, and caught the “Magic Shock Wave” attack. Next, he counter-attacked by swinging Holy Sword which cut off its arms.

However, by the time he was before its bosom to finish it off with a stab, just like before, he fell to his knees, lost his strength, and fell forward.

“Supreme Limit” had reached its time limit. It was the worst case scenario. Not only was weakened because of the after effect he had accumulated one impossible plight after another, he also could not move his body as though he was paralyzed.

“A-At Such a time!”

“Kouki!”

Covering Kouki, Shizuku slashed towards the wound Ahatd had on its arm that was cut off. Unable to calm down after its wound was slashed, Ahatd screamed and retreated. At that moment, Shizuku grabbed and threw Kouki to where their comrades were.

With Kouki incapable of moving, his comrades could only defend against the encircling demonic beasts. Then... I must do something! Shizuku aimed at the Demon Race woman. Her gaze unmistakably carried killing intent.

"...Heh~. You seem be conscious about the murder. Rather, aren't you the one most suitable to be called as Hero?"

"... I don't care. It is our fault Kouki did not realize it. That's why I will pay for that debt!"

Completely healed by the white crow's peculiar magic, the Demon Race woman stood up steadily and commented on Shizuku actions.

Shizuku should have known Kouki's straightforward character, and how deeply he sets his heart on something. She gritted her teeth because she felt responsible that it was only until now that Kouki realized they were killing people, and how he didn't realize their true enemies during this war.

Shizuku had no experience of murder, and she felt she did not want to experience it either. However, she was prepared such a day would come if she was going into a war. By learning swordsmanship, the "heaviness" of hurting people was driven into her.

However, now that the time has come, her resolution was easily shaken because of fear neither from

the shame nor honour, but because she wanted to cry due to the thing she was going to do. Even so, she bit her lip and gritted her teeth to desperately suppress her fear.

Thus, she took a stance as she activated “No Beat” to kill the Demon Race woman using the Godspeed from the sword drawing technique. However in that moment, a chill ran along her spine because her instinct warned her to imminent danger. Immediately, from the side of the location where she jumped back from, a black cat’s tentacles was fired.

“I never told the other demonic beasts to not aim at you. Do you think you can kill me with Ahatd and other demonic beasts as your

enemies."

"Kuh."

Saying, "Of course I am also going to kill you," the Demon Race woman began to chant. Shizuku somehow managed to break through the waves of attacks from the demonic beasts using acceleration and deceleration without preliminary action of "No Beat," but her expression was gradually dyed in despair when she tried to move before the Demon Race woman through an opening.

The most difficult was that Ahatd had speed similar to Shizuku. The sturdy and gigantic figure was certainly seen by Shizuku, so even if she used the chance to jump

towards the Demon Race woman, its swung fist give an explosion-like impact that would immediately reach Shizuku.

Shizuku was a swordsman who specialized in speed, so her defense was extremely brittle. Evasion and parry were the basic of her defense. Besides, damages would accumulated little by little from “Magic Shock Wave”‘s after effect. Also, she could neither completely evade nor parry.

Following that, Shizuku’s movement had slightly become duller because of the accumulated damages. And that was fatal in a fight to death such as this.

WHHAAAAAM!!

“Aghh!!”

Although she immediately used the sword and sheath as shields, Ahatd’s fist crushed Shizuku’s partner and hit her shoulder. Having blown parallel to the ground, forcefully crashing, and continued skidding on the ground, Shizuku laid down helplessly. The arm on her right shoulder was bent into an impossible angle. It was completely crushed. And because the impact was passed into her body, she sometimes coughed up blood.

“Shizuku-chan!”

Kaori called Shizuku with tone overflowed with uneasiness, but Shizuku could not move at all even

as she gripped the handle of her broken sword while crouching.

At that time, the things about her comrades, formation, and her exhausted magic power, there was be no meaning for her to come to Shizuku's side, but other logical reasons had completely disappeared from her mind. Kaori's only thought was she "must go to her important best friend's side."

Kaori dashed out due to impulse. Her body was swaying and her feet weren't steady because she hardly had any magic power. Although there were voices behind that tried to stop her, they did not reach Kaori's ears. She was only trying her best to recklessly rush towards Shizuku. Naturally, the demonic

beasts did not overlook the defenseless Kaori, and merciless attacks poured towards her.

However, all of those attacks were received by shining shields. Moreover, the numerous shields were standing just like a passage between Kaori and Shizuku.

“Ehehe. As expected, being alone is unpleasant.”

Suzu said with a pale expression. She held out her right hand straight towards Shizuku, and used all of her shields to make a beeline between Kaori and Shizuku. A faint smile floated on her face.

Suzu had realized it herself. Realized they could not survive at

all. That's why, she thought of using her magic to allow her to be together with the best friends she loved even in the last moment. Naturally, the defense on the other comrades had become thinner as the effect... so Suzu, "I am sorry," apologized in her mind, and continued to put up her shields for Kaori and Shizuku.

With Suzu's shields, Kaori reached Shizuku with only few wounds. Then, she embraced Shizuku's body tightly.

"K-Kaori... what are you doing... Get back, hurry. It's dangerous here."

"Uun. It is the same anywhere. That's why, it's okay for me to be by Shizuku-chan's side."

“... I am sorry. I can’t win.”

“Me, too, I am sorry I can’t really do anything. I have hardly any magic power.”

Supporting Shizuku, Kaori was frowning while smiling while using her magic to lessen Shizuku’s pain. Shizuku on the other hand, used her solid right arm to grasp the hand Kaori was using to support her, and sported a troubled smile.

A shadow appeared before the two. It was Ahatd. With bloodshot eyes, it approached and looked down at Kaori and Shizuku. “RoOoOaR!!,” it raised its characteristic roar and swung its thick arm.

Unbeknownst to them, Suzu’s

shields had been put between Ahatd, and Kaori and Shizuku to interrupt it from coming any closer. However, it just ignore such barriers. It was probably because it was convinced that its swung fist would easily destroy the shields just like papers and use the shockwave to crush Kaori and Shizuku.

Currently, with the iron hammer of death swinging before them, various scenes passed through Kaori's mind. "Ah, I wonder is this the revolving lantern?," and she strangely calmed down, but Kaori who was flooded with memories had her heart shaken by the latest scene that appeared.

It was the tea party under the moonlight. The memories of the

two conversing. The night when she said a vow. The disappeared him who made a troubled smile. How she began to realize her “love” once he disappeared. How she chased after him, believing in his survival.

However, those would also end here. “In the end, I was once again unable to hold up my promise,” thinking so, tears flowed on Kaori’s cheeks before she was aware of it.

First, I want to call out to him if we ever meet again, Kaori thought so. With such a wish, at the very least, I will call his name at the end... and she naturally said.

“... Hajime-kun.”

At that moment.

KABOoOoOM!!

The ceiling above Ahatd fell with a roaring sound, and at the same time, a huge, jet-black stake flew out with an extreme power cladded in red thunder.

Raising sparks, the jet-black stake pierced through Ahatd as though it was a tofu, and it then pierced and was stuck on the ground.

With length around 120 centimeters, the huge stake buried itself into the ground while releasing red sparks. Flesh and blood scattered from the center where Ahatd's remains were with its original form nowhere to be seen. The spectacle made Kaori, Shizuku, and of course Kouki's

party, the demonic beasts attacking them, and the Demon Race woman stiffened.

A silent unbecoming of a battlefield ruled the room. No one, not even a thing understood what had happened as they stood in bewilderment. Suddenly, a shadow jumped down from the opened ceiling. The person landed and lightly trampled down on the Ahatd's remains with his back before Kaori and Shizuku, and when he got off it, the person glared at the surroundings.

When he looked over his shoulder, he saw Kaori and Shizuku who were embracing each other.

The moment the person turned

around, their eyes met, and a lightning ran through Kaori's body. Her heart had been cold accompanied by sorrow, no, probably it was freezing since the day her important person disappeared, but a sudden fire lighted it and heated it up Thu-thump, thu-thump. Her heart began to throb intensely.

"...Your relationship is good as usual, you two."

The person said with a wry smile, and Kaori's mind was filled with delight even before she could think about it.

The hair color was different, the aura was different, the tone was different, and the appearance was

different. However, she knew. It is him. It is he whose survival she believed in while she looked for him.

That's right,

"Hajime-kun!"

Chapter 78 : The Peerless Incompetent

* * *

“Eh? Hajime-kun? Wait, Nagumo-kun? Eh? What? What do you mean?”

Kaori’s ecstatic shout made Shizuku, who was by her side, confused and looked alternately between Kaori and Hajime. Apparently, Kaori was able to see through the white haired, eye-patched, black-coated person before her as Hajime with just a single glance, but Shizuku was still unable

to recognize him.

However, when she saw the boy's face who was looking back over his shoulder with a wry smile, it immediately overlapped with Nagumo Hajime in her memory, and Shizuku, with widened eyes, raised a surprised voice.

"Eh? Eh? Really? Is he really Nagumo-kun? Eh? What? What's really happening here?"

"Well, just calm down, Yaegashi. Aren't calm, cool, and collected your main selling point?"

The chain of events happened after she, Shizuku, just like Kaori, was prepared to die which made her perplexed and she forgot her pain.

Admonishing her as he said Shizuku's name, Hajime suddenly looked overhead, feeling their presences. Thus, the falling blond-haired girl, Yue, was caught by him in princess carry style and he carefully let her down, next he received the rabbit-eared girl, Shia, who jumped down the same way.

The last to jump down was a boy dressed in black, Endou Kousuke.

"Na-Nagumoo! You-! I was blown away by that! Wait, what was that just now!? It suddenly pierced the dungeon's floors..."

Endou looked at the surrounding, started complaining. Then, he saw his best friends and the others together with a group of demonic

beasts. After noticing that he was being watched by his stiffened classmates, “Nuoh!,” and released a strange shout. To Endou, they voices were half-filled with joy because of their reunion, and anger because he came back.

“”Kousuke!””

“Jyuugo! Kentarou! I’ve come with help!”

Reacting to “I’ve come with help,” Kouki’s party and the demon race woman finally returned to their sense. Then, they once again stared at Hajime and the two girls. However, not minding the gazes of those in his surroundings, Hajime quickly ordered Yue and Shia with a slightly irritated expression.

“Yue, sorry but please protect those people gathered there. Shia, please look at the condition of the fallen man in Knight’s armor there.”

“Nn... leave it to me.”

“Roger~!”

Yue calmly walked without caring about the surrounding demonic beasts, while Shia used her marvelous jumping power to jump overhead the group of demonic beasts and landed beside the collapsed Meld.

“Ha-Hajime-kun...”

Kaori once again called Hajime’s name with a shaking voice. Her tone was probably filled with joy due to the reunion, yet there was

also sorrow. It was because she thought Hajime had came here to die. Although Kaori didn't know the details, her expression was telling him to immediately get away from the place.

Shrugging his shoulders, he returned Kaori's gaze. Hajime briefly said, "It's okay now, so just wait there." After saying that, he activated "Light Speed" which greatly improved his perception. Then, he took out three Cross Bits from "Treasure Box" which surrounded Kaori and Shizuku like shields.

The floating cross-like objects that suddenly appeared from empty space surprised Kaori and Shizuku. With his back before the two,

Hajime made a proposal towards the demon race woman whose appearance could be seen as nothing but arrogance. It was his mercy since the demon race woman was still not his enemy.

“The red-haired woman over there. I won’t do anything if you leave immediately. Just disappeared quickly from here if you don’t want to die.”

“...What did you say?”

It was not a remark that could be said by an ordinary human while being surrounded by demonic beasts. It was the reason why the demon race woman inadvertently asked back. As a response, Hajime repeated himself with an amazed

expression.

“Prompt decisions are needed in battlefields. That’s why I said, just disappear from here quickly if you don’t want to die. Understand now?”

Knowing she did not hear it wrong, the demon race woman erased her expression and ordered the demonic beasts while pointing at Hajime, “Kill him.”

This time, the too abrupt situation —— especially the dead of her treasured Ahatd due to an unknown attack made the demon race woman lose her calm and make a fatal mistake.

Even if Hajime had his own

objection, the woman was too enraged by Hajime who by the course of events treaded on Ahatd, a demonic beast she didn't want to lose since it was given to her by her revered superior. In addition, there was the confusion due to the unbelievable situation where the dungeon's ceiling had been destroyed just because he wanted to go downstairs. In any case, she would have been able to make a more careful judgement if it was the usual her. However, the glove had been thrown out.

"I see... So, I take it that you're an "enemy", right?"

Hajime muttered at the same time the Chimera attacked him. Behind Hajime, "Hajime-kun!" and

“Nagumo-kun!” warning voices filled with urgency could be heard. However, Hajime casually clawed the Chimera attacking from his left with his artificial arm and lifted it without any difficulty.

The Chimera was surprised and struggled to escape which made the space blurred intensely. Looking at it, Hajime looked at it with scorn.

“Oi, oi, what is this? This half-assed peculiar magic. Are you a street performer?”

Because there’s no meaning if one’s presence and figure disappears when spaces blurs when it moves. Hajime inadvertently retorted. Even in the abyss, there were demonic beasts that could conceal their

presences and figuring out what each of them has was extremely troublesome. Comparing it to them, Hajime thought it was too childish that the concealment exposed when it moved.

Standing still while he raised a Chimera with huge body weighing several hundreds kilograms as it struggling mid air, Hajime made the demon race woman, Kaori, and the others dumbfounded.

Hajime leered at them and used “Great Arm” to throw the Chimera on the ground as though he had lost his interest in it.

BoOoOoOmM!!

BaAaAaANNNG

With a raw sound ringing out, the Chimera had its head crushed and made a crater on the ground. Next, having drawn out Donner, Hajime turned the railgun towards the space that seemed to be empty at a glance and fired it in succession.

BAAANG BAAAAANNNG!!

Dry, explosive sounds rang out and two flashes cut through the air, mercilessly piercing respective targets. The space blurred for a moment, then a Chimera with a blasted head and a Brutal-look-alike whose heart had been shot through appeared. They stood still for a second, swayed, and crumbled to ground.

Not moving but could not conceal

the wind flow, the shaking of the air and ground, their gazes, killing intent, flow of magic, and temperature made them nothing but unmoving targets for Hajime.

Without even looking at the demonic beasts he instantly killed, Hajime took a step forward into the battlefield, no, the execution ground. What started could not even be called deathmatch. It was a one-sided execution by the monster who shouldn't be made into an enemy.

The demon race woman was shocked seeing the demonic beasts were killed casually and easily while the classmates stood still feeling the chill from the weapon that shouldn't exist in this world.

Leaving aside those stiffened people, the demonic beasts were attacking Hajime one after another, faithfully executing the demon race woman's order.

A black cat creeped behind him and fired its tentacles, but Hajime didn't turn around and only turned the wrist of his lowered arm where Donner was and fired behind. The bullet exceeding the speed of sound easily gouged through the black cat's forehead.

Without stopping to look at their companion, four-eyed wolves rushed towards him from left and right at the same time. However, Schlag, unknown as to when it was drawn, blew the enemy on his left while Donner blown off the one on

the right.

At that moment, the black cats hidden behind the annihilated four-eyed wolves shot their tentacles in cooperation with the Chimeras that were approaching Hajime's back. However, Hajime had jumped several meters above, flipped mid-air, and while hanging upside down, the floating black cats and the two Chimera, who lost sight of their target, became preys for the railgun.

Within the scattered flesh and blood that looked like flower storm, two Brutal-look-alikes came and swung their maces, aiming for the moment Hajime landed. However, such an easily predicted future wouldn't work on a monster such as Hajime, and he jumped further

using “Aerodynamic” mid-air. He then fired Donner-Schlag to his left and right in succession while spinning like a top.

The released wind of killing intent not only moved towards the two Brutal-look-alikes that were waiting for him, but it also pierced and burst to pieces the heads of the Chimeras and four-eyed wolves that were approaching from behind. While each of the demonic beasts sprayed and scattered blood, Hajime descend as though to follow the law of inertia and dulled the momentum right before he landed.

Landing soundlessly in the center of the corpses and a ground dyed with blood, Hajime took out ammo from an empty space and use gunspin to

reload them.

And at that time, “KuWAaAA!,” a strange sound rang out all of a sudden. Hajime turned toward the source and there was the six-legged turtle-like demonic beasts, Absod, whose wide opened mouth was turned towards Hajime. Inside its mouth was a compression of tremendous power shining a pure white light.

It was the previously stored huge magic power from Commander Meld’s “Last Loyalty.” The “Last Loyalty”‘s range was only few meters but its power was more than enough to decimate a person.

The magic power was compressed to the limit and in the next moment

it was launched like a laser towards its target, Hajime. The death light approached as it gouged out the ground on its track. However, Hajime calmly took out a large, coffin-like shield from an empty space, equipped it on his left arm, and activated “Vajra” the same time he held up the shield. Just like a huge tree whose roots were firmly rooted on the ground, there was no impatience in Hajime’s eyes which showed his firm will.

A tremendous roar resounded the moment the laser-like magic power hit, and the trembling air expressed how strong it was. However, Hajime, who received the direct hit, didn’t even move a step away, but rather, he sported a mischievous smile, and began to slant the shield

to parry the attack. The destination of where the attack was averted to was...

“Kh!? Damn it!”

It was the demon race woman. Since the time Hajime began to easily kill the demonic beasts, she sensed the crisis and began to chant powerful magic with an exaggerated chant, but Hajime noticed it and redirect Absod’s attack towards the demon race woman to obstruct her.

The unexpected situation made the demon race woman take an evasive action in a panic, but Hajime only adjusted the angle of his shield for the attack to reach her. The torrent of light approached her and

destroyed the wall, made the demon race woman frantically ran on the side of the wall. Her expression was one where there was not the slightest hint of composure remained.

However, the attack gradually drew near her back, and when she thought she would be mowed down by the attack she had ordered to be released, the magic power stored by Absod had reached the bottom and the attack ended.

“Tch...”

Without any room to react to Hajime who clicked his tongue, the demon race woman breathed a sigh of relief only to be frozen in the next moment.

BaAaAaANNNG!!

An explosive sound roared along with the feeling of heat passing right beside her right cheek, and something white splattered.

That something was the remains of the white crow which was previously stood on the demon race woman's shoulder. Although things had not been going the way he expected, Hajime countered by firing Donner aiming at Absod while Schlag was aimed at the white crow.

Even if Absod tried to evade only to endure the bullet so even with its tremendous velocity, it would only leave a small sound, but it could not even sense the bullet which ended

up piercing through its opened mouth and its consciousness fell into darkness for eternity.

Even the white crow had its body burst open and had died in an instant, scattering white feathers along with its flesh and blood. Receiving the after effect of the railgun, the demon race woman lost her balance, fell on her butt, and absentmindedly patted her own cheek. What stuck there were the white crow's flesh and blood, and at the same time she felt the heat from the severe burn.

If it shifted just by a few centimeters... The demon race woman was trembling when she thought of what might have happened. In other words, Hajime

whose matchless strength allowed him to playfully kill the army of demonic beasts as though he was killing bugs before her eyes, and could have also killed her at any time. Even now, her life was in the palm of his hands.

The demon race woman had a strong pride as a warrior, but she could not stop her trembling body before the monster-like existence. What was that? Why did such a thing exist? How can I survive from that monster!? Such thoughts filled the demon race woman's mind, and it continued to circle round and round inside her.

Kouki and the others felt the same as her. They could not immediately see through the white haired,

eyepatched boy as Hajime. They could not understand who was the unknown person who easily annihilated the demonic beasts that had put them into such predicament.

“What was that...? Just who in this world is he!?”

Kouki muttered while his unmoving body was laid on the ground. Everyone around him also had the same questions forming in their minds. The one who answered was the person they asked to retreat only to return here by his own will, Endou.

“Haha, I know it is unbelievable... but he is Nagumo.”

“”””””Hah?”””””””

Endou’s words made Kouki and the others leaked those words at the same time. Seeing Endou, they though, “Is this guy’s head okay?,” and made some gesture with their hands. Thinking, it can’t be helped, huh~, Endou could only shrugged his shoulders because he was only stating the truth.

“Like I said, he is Nagumo, Nagumo Hajime. The Nagumo who fell from the bridge at that day. He survived in the depth of the dungeon and climbed up with his own power. When coming here, he treated the demonic beasts as if they are just small fries. It’s seriously unbelievable!, I thought so, too… but it is the truth.”

“Nagumo, eh? You mean Nagumo is alive!?”

Kouki said with a surprised voice. Thus, the others also simultaneously tried to look at the boy with monstrous strength who was advancing the annihilation progress... but as expected they tried to deny it while thinking, “Just how is he Nagumo?” Endou understood their feelings and with a gesture he said, “Well, it’s true. Although he has completely changed, I’ve seen his status plate,” Endou told them again that the boy was Nagumo Hajime while sporting a dry smile.

Everyone felt it was unbelievable as they vacantly looked at Hajime’s peerlessness, and a person who was

awfully flustered said,

“L-Lies. Nagumo is dead. Wasn’t that the case? Everyone also saw it. There’s no way he is alive! We have already agreed on that!”

“Uwah, what’s with you! I have seen his status plate so there’s no mistake it is him.”

“Lies! There’s must be some trick! He must be in disguise and trying to trick us!”

“No, just what are you saying? There’s no reason for him to do that.”

The one who was saying unreasonable things and grabbed Endou’s collar was Hiyama. He was denying Hajime’s survival with an

abnormally paled complexion. Kondou and the others around him were somewhat taken aback by Hiyama's appearance.

The agitated Hiyama was doused by cold water, literally. A large amount of water suddenly appeared above Hiyama and poured down on him like a small waterfall. Hiyama somewhat drowned because it matched the timing when he inhaled. After being doused with water, he had a coughing fit. What on earth!? Hiyama was confused only to be told by a cold voice far colder than the cold water.

"... Be quiet. It's irritating."

Although Hiyama seemed to getting more agitated and tried to object, he

instinctively swallowed his words when he turned his gaze towards the source of the voice. After all, the source of the voice, Yue, was looking at Hiyama with a very cold gaze as though she was looking at an insect. At the same time, not only a few would forget their situation after they were captivated by the ideal girl whose beauty was just like the highest grade bisque doll.

Same could be said for Kouki's party. Their gazes were naturally attracted to the beautiful looking girl whether they were female or male. Even Suzu was obviously captivated and said, "Whooaa~," with a strange voice. It wasn't simply because of her beauty, she was also cladded in a bewitching

atmosphere contrary to her young appearance which made Kouki's party captivated.

And at that time, maybe because of the demon race woman's instruction, several demonic beasts came to attack Kouki's party. She probably thought of turning them into hostages just like how she had used Meld. It was a normal measure since she couldn't even imagine of capturing Hajime with a fair challenge.

Suzu immediately thought of creating shields. Having activated magic one after another, her exhausted body was screaming. She bit her lips to prevent herself from blacking out... but Yue gently stopped Suzu with her hand.

Having Yue quietly patting her head, “Ehh?,” Suzu inadvertently said with a relaxed voice and stopped her chant.

“... Don’t worry.”

Yue muttered, and Suzu said, “Ah, it’s already safe now,” without any basis for it nor any power left her body. Even she herself didn’t know why she could simply accepted Yue’s words, but she felt she was being defended by a reliable big sister.

Yue looked away from Suzu and glared at the demonic beasts that readied their fangs, claws, tentacles, and maces. Then, with one sentence she pulled her magic’s trigger.

“”Blue Dragon.””

In the next moment, a bluish-white sphere with one meter in diameter appeared above Yue and the others. Those who used flame attribute magic knew it was one of the highest level magic, a blue flame magic capable of decimating anything it approached, “Blue Imperial.” It was abnormal to be able to activate it without any chant and in no time. Especially the rear group; they knew what happened and could only looked up at the blue blaze in blank surprise.

However, this was just the start of what would make them truly surprised. The blue flame burning radiantly suddenly changed its shape to one of a snake, attacked

the incoming maces swinging Brutal-look-alikes and the others by swallowing them. They were instantly killed, and not even an ash remained.

Before long, the shape of the blue flame changed and swam in the air. It was a blazing blue dragon, with length of around 30 meters. With Yue in the center, the blue dragon protected Kouki and the others by coiling around them. Then, it raised its head, and opened its jaws towards the demonic beasts which were standing still because they could not approach the the blue hellfire that would perish everything.

RoOoOAAAAR!!!

It roared. And immediately, the bodies of the demonic beasts flew. As though they were attracted by gravity, they jumped into the blue dragon's mouth one after another. Although the others understood it was not suicide since the demonic beasts desperately tried to escape in mid-air in panic due to the abrupt situation. Seeing the demonic beast throwing their bodies in queue towards the annihilation that didn't even leave an ash, made them think it as nothing but a bad joke.

"What is this magic..."

Someone muttered. The unknown magic had one-sidedly burnt the demonic beasts to annihilation by pulling them, which made Kouki's party unable to close their wide

opened mouths. But it couldn't be helped. After all, this magic was the same as "Thunder Dragon," an original magic of Yue's, formed by combining the highest fire magic element, "Blue Imperial," and one of the Age of Gods' magic, gravity magic.

Incidentally, the reason she used "Blue Dragon" and not "Thunder Dragon" was simply because Yue was training herself. Thunder Dragon was a combination between gravity magic and high-ranked wind attribute, thunder, so "Blue Dragon" had higher difficulty and power. Because she was just recently capable of combining highest level magic, she wanted to make its debut.

Naturally, Kouki's party who didn't know of the circumstances shifted their gazes from the "Blue Dragon" to Yue, about to ask for an explanation. However, calmly straightening its back, the Blue Dragon stopped and its flame shone brighter. Together with Yue's sublime figure, it made Kouki's party hold their breath, and they were unable to say the words to ask for an explanation. Several people quickly had their hearts stolen by Yue... especially Suzu; she was letting out an exclamation of joy like a small old man.

On the other side, when the demon race woman saw the bizarre "Blue Dragon" from the distance, she cursed in her mind, "There's only monsters here, huh!" Frustrated due

to the demonic beasts being exterminated one after another, she changed her aim to the RabbitMan girl beside the mortally wounded Meld, and the two girls close to each other who were separated from the others.

However, the demon race woman was further exposed to the arbitrary.

The Brutal-look-alike which came to attack Shia had its head blown away like a pinball with a swing from Doryukken. She then rotated her body using the momentum from her first attack towards the four-eyed wolf coming advancing from behind her and it died easily with its head crushed by an attack carrying enough centrifugal force.

Once again, Chimeras and black cats were about to attack Kaori and Shizuku. Shizuku gritted her teeth, and readied her broken sword towards the incoming; the scattered demonic beasts filled with killing intent. However, as if to stop them, the cross bits floating in her surrounding came in between Shizuku and the Chimeras.

Shizuku was somewhat shaken by the mysterious crosses were moving as though to protect her. Suddenly, the longer point of the crosses turned towards the Chimera and a roaring sounds rang out. “Seriously, what are those!?” Shizuku was shouting inside her mind, when something spinningly flew almost grazing her cheek and fell to the ground with a metallic sound. The

same roaring sound rang out beside Kaori, and the same sound of metal resounded, too, as expected.

Although confused, Kaori and Shizuku returned their attentions towards the incoming demonic beasts, and there were only the figures of demonic beasts with heads blown to pieces... They were speechless and turned their gazes towards the source of the metallic sounds and confirmed its identity.

“Isn’t that... cartridge?”

“Cartridge... a gun’s?”

Kaori and Shizuku faced each other as they said the unfamiliar term out loud. They were convinced once they saw Hajime’s figure rampaging

with guns in both hand. The crosses floating to defend them were similar to an all-range weapon from somewhere.

“A-Amazing... Hajime-kun can use Funnel.”

“Just, since when did he become a NewType...”

Kaori and Shizuku regained a lot of their composure after the surrounding demonic beasts were instantly exterminated. They let out unbecoming retorts which were actually transmitted to Hajime through the Cross Bits. And on the contrary, Hajime wanted to retort back in regards to how the two knew such references. However, Hajime did not worry about it

thanks to the skill he honed by being in the company of Yue and the girls, “Let it be”.

“Seriously... what’s with this.”

The demon race woman muttered powerlessly. No matter what she tried, everything was held down and crushed by sheer power. Such irrational things allowed her mind to be invaded by feeling of throwing in the towel. There were hardly any demonic beasts remaining, and it was obvious to anyone who was the victor and loser.

My last hope! The demon race woman fired magic towards Hajime for the sake of escaping and ran towards one of the four exits with all of her might. The magic fired

towards Hajime was “Final Prison.” It exploded right beside Hajime, and the petrifying smoke wrapped around him. Kouki’s party held their breaths while Kaori and Shizuku screamed Hajime’s name.

Leering at the shaken Kouki’s party, the demon race woman finally reached one of the exits.

However...

“Haha... I’ve been checkmated, huh.”

“It is certainly as you say.”

Before the demon race woman was the floating cross with its dark muzzle pointed at her from inside the passage. With a dry laughter, only now did she realize she had

been checkmated long since before she attacked Hajime, and the demon race woman inadvertently leaked a dry laughter. The hateful calm voice came from behind.

This time, the demon race woman looked back in resignation and she saw Hajime walking closer from inside the petrifying smoke as if nothing happened. Next, he scattered the petrifying smoke to the other passage by sweeping it away using the red wave of “Magic Emission.”

“... You monster. To take a high-ranked magic as something insignificant... You, are you really human?”

“Actually, even I’ve doubting that.

But, it isn't so bad to become a monster, you know?"

Hajime and the demon race woman said in a joking manner with only a slight distance between them. When the demon race woman took a look at the room, the demonic beasts had truly been annihilated before she was aware of it. Once again she cursed in a small voice, "You monster."

Ignoring her, Hajime aimed Donner's muzzle towards the woman. The weapon of death pointed right before her eyes made the demon race woman realize it was time for her to die, and she looked back.

"Well then, "Do you have anything

left to say?" Is what is usually said in these kinds of situation... Unfortunately, I don't have any interest in hearing your last will. More importantly, about why a person of the demon race had come here... and where you obtained those demonic beasts... Shall I have you spit it out?"

"Do you think I will speak? It might become an advantage for human race, right? As if I am that stupid."

The demon race woman snorted scornfully, which made Hajime look at her with cold gaze. Thus, without hesitation, he fired Donner to both of the demon race woman's legs.

"AgaaAH!!"

The demon race woman screamed and collapsed. The scream resounded inside the silent room where the demonic beasts had ceased to breathe. Hajime knew the classmates behind him were gulping because of his merciless action. However, not worrying about such things, Hajime asked again with Donner aimed at the woman.

“Whether it’s human race or demon race, I don’t care about your world’s circumstance. I am asking you not as someone from human race. I am only asking because I want to know it. So, answer it now.”

“...”

The demon race woman was glaring

at Hajime while gritting her teeth from the pain. Seeing her eyes, Hajime realized she was not likely to speak, so he began to speak instead.

“Well, I have roughly guessed it. You came here to conquer the “True Great Dungeon,” right?”

The demon race woman’s brows twitched from Hajime’s words. Hajime continued speaking while carefully observing the woman’s reaction.

“Those demonic beasts were the product of an Age of Gods magic... looks like I hit the bull’s eye. I see, so the change in demon race side was because they conquered a Great Dungeon and obtained the

Age of Gods magic which could enslave demonic beasts, huh... Resultantly, the human race side moved to conquer the Great Dungeon by investigating and then inviting the heroes..."

"How... it can't be..."

Hajime had stated his theories which was right on the mark, and it rattled the demon race woman. With the mortified expression, she questioned how he knew when a possibility came to mind. Seeing her expression, Hajime noticed the demon race woman had guessed Hajime was also another dungeon conqueror. With his glance, he responded, "Correct."

"I see, if you are the same as that

person... then I can understand your monster-like power... Ah, isn't that enough? Just kill me. After all, I have no intention of being a captive..."

"As that person... right. You must be referring to the conqueror whom you received the demonic beasts from, huh..."

The expression of the demon race woman's face told him she would rather commit suicide rather than to be taken as a captive. Thus, she wanted to at least die in battle. The information about another dungeon conqueror was enough for Hajime, so with thoughts of ending it, killing intent appeared in his eyes.

As revenge for dying in the middle

of her path, and unwillingness to admit defeat, the demon race woman muttered towards Hajime.

“Someday, my lover will kill you.”

Her words made Hajime’s lips curved and floated a fearless smile.

“I will kill my enemy, even if it is God. And if that person is someone who dances inside the palm of God’s, then he wouldn’t be able to reach me.”

There’s nothing left to talk about, so the two closed their mouths. Hajime turned Donner’s muzzle towards the demon race woman’s head.

However, the moment he was about to pull the trigger, a loud voice

stopped him.

“Wait! Just wait, Nagumo! She can no longer fight! So, it’s not necessary to kill her!”

“…”

With his finger still on Donner’s trigger, “What is this guy saying?,” Hajime looked over his shoulder with a dubious expression. Kouki managed to unsteadily stand up after he had slightly recovered and further raised his voice.

“Capture, right, just make her a captive. It’s absolutely unforgivable to kill someone who cannot resist. I am the hero. And Nagumo is my comrade, so please back away in consideration of me.”

Excuses that rendered too much retort was something Hajime thought there was no value in hearing it and swiftly discarded them. Silently,... he pulled the trigger.

BaAaAaANNNG!

The dry explosive sound echoed inside the room. Killing intent was aimed and a shot was fired through the demon race woman's forehead where she instantly died.

Silence engulfed their surrounding. The classmates finally understood and could only hold their bated breaths, puzzled to the spectacle where one of their classmate killed a person without hesitation. Amongst all of them, Kaori was

most shocked by it.

It was not about him killing a person. After all, Kaori herself had been prepared for it. It was a natural thing since they had entered the fight in this world. After all, fighting the demonic beast inside the dungeon was only combat exercise.

That's why, a day where killing one another would surely come, for she must kill hostile people, and she was prepared to do it. She was a healer who stand by the rear, but thinking of Shizuku, Kouki, and the others who were in the front lines — the time when her the hands of her friends will be dirtied by blood, even if it was just a little, made her heart resolved to not averting from such

situations even just for a moment.

What shocked Kaori was because she could not sense any aversion, disgust, and hesitation towards murder from Hajime. He killed a person as though it was natural as breathing. The Hajime Kaori knew was someone who even though he couldn't go against the others, he was a gentle and strong person capable of being able to jump into a whirlpool for the sake of others.

That form of being "strong" was not a power that came from violence. It was a strength due to "thinking about others" no matter what time or situation he was in. That's why, Hajime who could kill an enemy who had lost her spirit and would not resist with neither hesitation

nor had any deep emotion, had become someone completely different from Hajime she knew, and it shocked her.

Shizuku was her best friend, so she understood Kaori had received a powerful shock. However, she was able to guess what shocked Kaori from the scattered talk they usually had about Hajime when they were in Japan.

Shizuku looked at Hajime with a cool expression and she thought he had certainly changed, but she knew it was wrong for her, who knew nothing, to complain about it. That's why, as the result, she could do nothing but to stop being nestled close to Kaori.

However, naturally, the lump of justice called hero wouldn't be able to stay silent about it. Kouki's voice rang out as if to subdue the space filled with silence.

"Why, why did you kill her. Was there any necessary to kill her..."

Hajime was walking towards Shia's side and caught Kouki staring at him with a penetrating glare at the edge of his view. He hesitated for a moment thinking how he should answer, but in the next moment, to begin with, there's no need to answer!, he thought and decided to ignore Kouki.

However, whether the other party would allow Hajime's attitude was another problem...

Chapter 79 : The This and That After the Reunion

* * *

While the sound of Kouki's desperate voice subduing the silence, the person whom the words were directed to pretended as though he didn't hear anything and walked towards Shia's side, beside the collapsed Meld.

Thinking there was no longer a need to protect Kouki's party, Yue also walked towards Hajime and Shia. "Ahh, One-sama!," Suzu's shout, whose heart was just like a

small old man, came from behind her.

“Shia, how’s Meld’s condition?”

“It was almost too late. He would not survive if we were even a little slower... I used “Holy Water” as instructed, but... was it really okay to do that?”

“Ah, I was indebted to this person. Besides, the hole Meld left would be too big in a lot of ways. It’ll be especially problematic if someone weird took over the training of the Hero’s party. Well, seeing their current state, it looks like Meld was unable to finish their training properly... but it isn’t a mistake that he is a man of character. He is a person who will cause regret in

various meanings if he died.”

Kouki was currently glaring at Hajime. Supported by Ryuutarou, he walked towards Hajime accompanied by the other classmates. Shia was asking him for the reason of using Holy Water on Meld. Incidentally, what he meant by “someone weird” was the person from Church of the Saints such as Ishtal.

“... Hajime.”

“Yue. Thank you for listening to my request.”

“Nh.”

Yue had arrived at the time he was still speaking to Shia. While gently patting Yue’s cheek who was

looking up at him as she called his name, Hajime conveyed his gratitude. Yue's gaze expressed, "Don't mind," while delightedly narrowing her eyes. Naturally, Hajime's gaze softened and the two were watching each other.

"... You two, please read the mood... Come on, return to your senses! Everyone are almost gathered here!"

Hajime and Yue began to create their own world which could already be called a disease for them. Thus, Shia clapped her hands and retorted to make them return to their senses.

Apparently, the glares coming from Kouki with different meaning had increased and Hajime noticed it.

Especially a glare coming from different direction than Kouki and the others. It made him feel a chill running down on his spine.

“Oi, Nagumo. Why did you kill—...”

“Hajime-kun... even though there’s much I want to ask, how’s Meld-san’s condition? From what I see, the injuries had been closed and his breathing is also steady. But, he should’ve been mortally wounded...”

Kouki’s words to press a question onto Hajime was interrupted by Kaori, who came and knelt by Meld’s side with a serious expression and asked Hajime the details of Meld’s condition.

For a moment, Hajime felt the chill in his guts from Kaori's gaze, but thinking it was just his imagination, he decided to answer Kaori's question.

"Yeah, that's because... I used a rather special medicine. The liquid type that will instantly heal a person completely even if the person was dying."

"S-Such a medicine, how come I've never heard of it?"

"That is because it was once only a legend... and no one would be able to obtain it, normally. That's why, Yaegashi, you need to be healed by magic. And here is the potion to recover magic power."

“Eh, yes... Thank you.”

Being called by Hajime, Shizuku received the potion and slightly stammered while she said her gratitude due to the gap between the current Hajime and the Hajime in her memory. Hajime didn’t especially mind Shizuku’s reaction and he gave another magic power recovery potion to Kaori. Kaori caught the potion bottle and drunk the content after she said her gratitude to Hajime. With the Lipovitan-like taste spreading inside her mouth, her energy gradually recovered. The classmates should be immediately healed as long as Kaori recovers.

For now, Kaori and the others breathed sighs of relief because

they understood there was nothing to worry about in regards to Meld. Then, Kouki once again opened his mouth.

“Oi, Nagumo, I am grateful about Meld-san’s matter, but why did y—…”

“Hajime-kun. Thank you for saving Meld-san. Also, thank you… for saving us.”

Thus, he was once again interrupted by Kaori. Kouki now wore a truly subtle expression. However, Kaori completely not noticing Kouki’s expression since she was looking straight at Hajime. Even though she received a severe shock from Hajime’s changes, there were things she wanted to say. She

walked up until she was right before Hajime to say her gratitude about Meld's matter and how he saved them.

Afterwards, while grasping her skirt with both hands, guh, the things she wanted to say were on the tip of her tongue, but she couldn't say anything and her tears began to fall. Although she was sobbing, she didn't look away from Hajime as though to confirm the him before her was not an illusion. Hajime silently returned Kaori's gaze.

"Hajime-gun... dank God, gusuh, dat you'r alive. Dat time, I am sorry... hic... dat I couldn't protect you... waaa."

Amongst the classmates, the girls

held warm gazes because they could guess Kaori's feelings. Some of the boys also had warm gazes, but Kondou and some others had bitter expressions, while Kouki and Ryuutarou were dumbfounded since they could not understand Kaori. The most dense protagonist on earth, Kouki, and the muscle for a brain, Ryuutarou, made it hard for Shizuku and it could be seen in her eyes.

With troubled expression, Shia said, "Uh, by any chance, is she a new rival?," while Yue was looking at Kaori with the usual silent and expressionlessness.

The Kaori before him was crying which messed her face, and Hajime wore an indescribable expression

when he realized Kaori had been worrying about him since the day he fell just as Endou had said.

The truth was, he had told Yue once about his circumstance along with the story about Kaori, but that was when they were still in the abyss, and he had completely forgotten about Kaori until he met Aiko and the others in Ul. That's why, he was gradually feeling guilty because she thought of him this strongly.

After sporting a troubled and at lost expression, Hajime answered Kaori's words with a bitter smile.

"...What to say, looks like I've made you worried. I am sorry for not immediately telling you about it. Well, just as you see, I am alive... so

there's no need to apologize... Also, umm, please don't cry."

Hajime said while looking at Kaori with the same gentle gaze when he was worrying about Kaori and said, "Please protect me." Upon seeing his gaze, Kaori felt her chest being filled with the memory of the night when they exchanged the promise. Inadvertently, Waahh, she cried and jumped into Hajime's chest.

At a loss of what to do about Kaori who was crying while clinging on his chest, Hajime held up both of his hands. If it was another classmate, he would have mercilessly threw the person away since he would feel irritated and use yakuza kick to make the person unconscious. However, the pure

and never changing goodwill which was the same even before he fell into the abyss made him incapable of treating her coldly.

But with Yue by his side, he couldn't embrace another woman and could only hold up his hands as though someone had pointed gun's muzzle at him, becoming a half assed respond since he just let Kaori cry. It was truly not Hajime-like.

"My best friend is crying! So, hug her!," was what Shizuku's gaze who was beside him was saying, but it was hard to move because Yue was also watching him in silence. Being helpless, he lightly pat Kaori's head to stop her after a while. Really, Hajime had became a good for

nothing.

“...Fuu, Kaori is really gentle. She even cry in joy from her classmate’s survival... However, Nagumo killed a non-resisting person. We need to talk. That’s why, that’s enough and you should get away from Nagumo.”

“You, read the mood!,” was what some of the classmates criticized Kouki with their gazes. Even in such time, this boy was still unable to be considerate to Kaori’s feeling. While glaring at Hajime mixed with condemn, he tried to pull Kaori away from Hajime. Maybe it was simply because he didn’t want others to touch Kaori or because the caution he held from being beside a murderer... or maybe both.

“Wait, Kouki! Isn’t Nagumo-kun the one who saved us? How can you said such things?”

“But, Shizuku. That woman already lost her spirit to fight. There’s no need to kill her. So what Nagumo did is something I can’t allow.”

“See here, Kouki, can you cut it out already? To begin with…”

Kouki’s objection was rebutted by Shizuku. The other classmates were flustered since they didn’t know what to do, but Hiyama’s gang who never liked Hajime began to support Kouki.

Gradually, it became a discussion about Hajime’s action. Kaori had already separated from Hajime’s

chest and wiped her tears, but there was still the shock she received from a while ago, so she fell silent with a difficult expression while she was thinking of something.

Suddenly, a voice came to douse them with cold water.

“...What foolish people. Hajime, can we leave now?”

“Ah~, yup, let’s go.”

The one calling Kouki and the others “foolish” with tone so cold as if it was in absolute zero was Yue. Although the voice was spoken in small mutter, it clearly resounded even inside the commotion of Kouki and the others. For a moment, silence wrapped their

location, then Kouki and the others moved their gazes towards Yue.

To begin with, the reason Hajime came here after hearing Endou's story was his obligation to Kaori, and it had been accomplished. Thus, he went out of the room following Yue who pulled his hand. Shia followed after them without minding the others.

As such, the action of Hajime's party made Kouki and the others stop.

"Please stop. Our talk here isn't over yet. I won't take Nagumo as my comrade if he doesn't tell me his real intention. Besides, just who do you think you are? Although I am grateful for your help, to call us

foolish at our first meeting... isn't that rude? Just what is foolish about us?"

"..."

Kouki once again talk about something out of topic. Although what he said was correct in such situations, comparing their circumstances made Yue wanted to say, "Try to think while putting your hand on your chest." To even go this far, it wouldn't be strange to say Kouki was cursed by something.

Maybe because Yue had forsaken Kouki already; she didn't look at him, expressing there's no value in looking at him. Kouki was slightly irritated and frowned being of Yue's attitude, but he immediately floated

a gentle smile again, thinking she was just an ordinary girl, and he tried to talk to Yue.

Because this wouldn't end with the way it was going and he felt Yue's discomfort, Hajime decided to answer a little and sighed with an expression as though saying it was a hassle.

"Amanogawa. I have neither care nor obligation to answer everything to you whose existence is a joke in more ways than one. But, I'll point it out to you a little because you are being persistent about it."

"Point it out, you say? Are you saying I am wrong? I, I only say something obvious as a person."

Because, It's troublesome, truly!, was what Hajime expression turned to. Kouki irritatedly objected Hajime's words which was then ignored, and Hajime continued his words.

"You can't fool me."

"What's with that..."

"You, you are not angry because I killed that woman. You are only feeling unpleasant to see a person's death. However, you knew you are mistaken to blame me to kill the woman who murdered the Knights and tried to kill you. That's why you're using "killing a non-resisting person" as your main point, right? Being made to see something you didn't want to see and for someone

to easily do things you couldn't... those are the cause of your anger. However, you tried to cover it under the name of justice. What worse is you yourself aren't conscious of it. You never change, huh. You interpret things at your own convenience as natural as breathing."

"Y-You are wrong! Don't say something for your own convenience! It is the true you killed a non-resisting person!"

"I killed my enemy, what's wrong with that?"

"Wh-!? What are you saying? It's murder! Of course it is wrong!"

"Haa, I don't want to discuss with

you, so can we end it now? ———— I, I won't give any mercy to my enemy. If someone opposed me, as long as I don't have any other need for it, I will absolutely kill that person. I don't care whether they are good or evil, resisting or not. Hatefully, I knew I'd be dead if I show even a moment of weakness. This is my sense of value cultivated inside the abyss, and I won't force it to other. But, if someone doesn't like it and tried to block me..."

Hajime instantly closed the distance and pressed the muzzle against Kouki's forehead. At the same time, Hajime's "Pressure" activated and the dense killing intent fell into the surrounding like a large, powerful waterfall. Kouki's party held their breaths. Even Kouki, who was able

to chase after Shizuku whose movement was the fastest among his comrades, could not even perceive Hajime's earlier movement and he trembled in fear.

"I will kill them, even if that person is a former classmate of mine."

"Y-You..."

"Don't misunderstand, okay? I never thought of returning to you. Also, I am not your comrade. I only came here to pay my obligation to Shirasaki. It's a goodbye after we get out of here. I have my own path to take."

After saying so, he glared at Kouki who couldn't say anything and was holding his breath. Hajime returned

Donner to its holster, and with “Pressure” deactivation, the classmates exhaled greatly while looking at Hajime with complexed gazes. However, Kouki still could not accept it and tried to argue some more. But it was prevented by Yue’s harsh words while she wore a disgusted expression.

“...The one who fought was Hajime. The loser who ran away after being defeated in fear has no qualification to criticize him.”

“Wh—, you say I ran away...”

Actually it was not a coincidence Hajime’s party could pinpointed their location. The truth was, Hajime guessed the explosive torrent of magic power he felt to be

coming from Kouki's party when he was still in upper floor. Then, he used full advantage of his perception type skills to search for people presences downstairs and used transmutation along with pile bunker to pierce through the floors.

The torrent of magic power he felt at that time was Kouki's "Supreme Break." Feeling the huge power, Hajime's party understood that Kouki would be able to defeat the demon race woman in that condition. That's why they could see through that Kouki hesitated to kill and invited their predicament after coming to their location. It was why Yue said, "he ran away after being defeated in fear."

Kouki tried to refute Yue, but a deep

voice interrupted him.

“Stop it, Kouki.”

“Meld-san!”

Meld’s consciousness had returned a while ago and he heard the conversation between Kouki and the others. Still somewhat in a daze, he stood up and shook his head to clear his mind. Next, he saw his abdomen which surely had been injured, and so he tilt his head in confusion.

Kaori explained to Meld in details about what had happened. Knowing he was miraculously helped with a valuable medicine and hearing the owner was Hajime, Meld was happy from the depth of his heart that

Hajime was alive. Moreover, he thanked Hajime for saving him. He grandly prostrated for being unable to save him at that time which made Hajime felt uncomfortable to receive his apology.

Rather than not minding it, Hajime had completely forgotten when Meld said, “I will absolutely save you,” ... but he read the mood when Meld was before him, apologizing while bowing deeply.

When his conversation with Hajime ended, Meld turned towards Kouki and apologized just like what he did to Hajime.

“M-Meld-san? Why, why are you apologizing?”

“Of course. I am your trainer… but, I forgot to teach you an important thing during a fight. It’s the resolution to kill a person. When the time comes, I’ve thought of making you experience killing people by setting them up as thieves while making it look like a coincidence… After all, that experience is something necessary if you participate in war against the demon race… However, I’ve spent a lot of time conversing with you which made me think if it was really okay to let you experience that… Thus, I’ve hesitated. If I am thinking of my position as the commander of the Knights, I would have taught you even earlier, but… a little longer, just a little longer, until we cleared this. Things dragged on in this manner and reached this

situation... I am just being half-assed. It's my mistake as your trainer. That's why, to make you face death... I apologize."

Saying so, Meld once again bowed which made the classmates try and comfort him in hurry. Apparently, Meld had been considerably worried about Kouki's party. He was likely being pulled apart by his mission as the commander and him as a person.

Meld is a citizen of the Kingdom and a believer of Church of the Saints. Therefore, it wasn't weird that he felt it was natural and an honor for Kouki and the others, the "God's Apostles," to fight the demon race. However, he doubted as he fought along with Kouki's

party which meant he was a good or maybe a gentle person, and at the level of a man of character just as Hajime said.

Hearing what was in Meld's mind, Kouki fell silent. After knowing that he must kill people in due time, he recalled his fear when he was about to kill the demon race woman. At the same time, he received shock from Meld's words saying they would kill people masked as thieves for the sake of training. If it's thieves, then we have power to overwhelm them. But to purposely killed them... he thought.

On the other side, Kaori was also silent. But it was not because she heard Meld's words. For a long time, she had been thinking about

Hajime's words.

The sense of value cultivated inside the abyss where enemy would be killed without hesitation even if it was his classmate... were impossible words coming from Hajime of the past. However, he proved he was serious with the previous killing intent. The Hajime who was gentle and acted by putting the sake of others before him had unhesitatingly turned his killing intent towards them. Kaori was perplexed and shaken by the differences between Hajime she knew and Hajime before her. Thinking of the Hajime who was worried about her from a little ago was an illusion, Kaori was uneasy.

While she was thinking, Kaori

suddenly felt someone's gaze. Before Kaori was the blond-haired, red-eyed beautiful girl. A beautiful girl that made even Kaori instinctively charmed. She was quietly observing Kaori with eyes where no feeling could be felt.

Kaori recalled the girl had been fairly intimate with Hajime which made Kaori interested and turned to look at Yue. For a while, the two watched each other.

"...Fu."

"Kh..."

However, Yue was the first to avert her gaze while sneering.

Kaori inadvertently held her breath. It was because she noticed the

meaning behind her sneer. It was, “If you are shaken by this, just forget about Hajime,” something like that.

Yue had of course guessed how Kaori feels about Hajime from her attitude. Thus, hearing she believed of Hajime’s survival even though he fell into the abyss, a strong rival in love might show up, I must stand tall!, was what she thought.

However, when she saw Kaori comparing the past and current Hajime, and it resulted in her being shaken and perplexed while being taken aback by the differences. Although that reaction was as natural as possible for a person... it made Yue see her as insignificant.

You can't even become an enemy. From now on, Hajime is only mine. Hajime's "special" person is me! The implied declaration made Kaori's face red; red from shame and anger. However, Kaori could not refute since she had lost sight of the human called Hajime. The first encounter between Yue and Kaori resulted in Yue as the victor.

Leering at Kouki and the others whose mood became subtle, Hajime took Yue and Shia along, collected the pile bunker's stake, and tried to go through the opened hole. Noticing what he was doing, Kouki and the others began to follow Hajime's party. Endou had proposed for everyone to take advantage of Hajime's party until they reached the surface, and Meld

was being carried by Hajime after they pleaded him.

On the way to the surface, the demonic beasts that tried to obstruct them were instantly killed by Hajime which made them once again amazed by his strength. The classmates wore various expressions thinking whether he was the same person who was once called “incompetent.”

Hiyama was glaring at Hajime with paled complexion, Kondou’s gang were sending him begrudging gazes, and Nagayama’s party were looking at him admiringly as they wore complex expressions due to Hajime clearly saying he was not their comrade.

Even though Kondou's gang had closely seen Hajime's prowess and shrunk before it, they still thought Hajime was the same as the previous him. On the other side, Nagayama's party knew what kind of treatment Hajime received from Hiyama and his gang and pretend to not see it, so now they felt guilty about it. They thought it could not be helped that Hajime didn't think of them as his comrades...

Receiving various gazes from Kouki and the others behind him, Hajime just ignored them and advanced on his own road.

On the way, Suzu's inner oldman caused commotion as she tried to talk to Yue about various things. She also barraged Hajime with

questions about what happened, then she turned her aim towards Shia's huge breasts and rabbit-ears. When she realized the two just ignored her, she was then physically stopped by Shizuku. Kondou's gang tried to talk to Yue and Shia fully loaded with desire, but were completely ignored, even so they kept being persistent. They tried to touch Shia's rabbit-ears without permission which awarded them with Hajime's rubber bullets. They vomited after receiving yakuza kicks, and fear was driven into them when they received a slight killing intent leaking from Hajime ———— various things happened, and finally the group reached the surface.

Kaori was still looking down,

worrying. Shizuku was also worriedly watching Kaori and drew closer to her. However, a situation where an impact blew away all of Kaori's worries had happened. It was a situation she couldn't overlook as a woman whose heart was set on Hajime.

It happened when they arrived at the entrance of «Orcus Great Dungeon».

"Ah! Papaa~!"

"Uh! Myuu, huh."

It was the appearance of a little girl calling Hajime papa.

Chapter 80 : Declaration of War

* * *

“Papaa~!! Welcome back~!!”

A cheerful little girl’s voice rang out inside the plaza of «Orcus Great Dungeon»’s entrance gate.

Adventurers and mercenaries, who were going to dive into the dungeon, were noisily negotiating with the merchants who were also advertising themselves in various crowded stalls. However, Myuu’s raised voice, which rivaled their own, made the experts of battle look at her and smile as their gazes

softened.

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap—! Myuu ran straight towards Hajime while making such lovely footsteps, and then jumped into Hajime. Hajime failed to receive her since he hadn't even dreamed she would do that.

In a normal situation, the little girl's head would have thrust into his stomach like a rocket and made him writhe in pain. But fortunately, Hajime's body was not that weak. Moreover, he completely warded off the impact so he would not injure Myuu, and firmly caught her.

"Myuu, you came to welcome us? Where's Tio?"

"Un. Tio-oneechan thought it was

about time for Papa to come back. That's why we came here. Tio-oneechan is..."

"This one is here."

Separating the crowd, a beautiful, black-haired, golden-eyed, young woman appeared. Needless to say, it was Tio. Since she was within the crowd where it wasn't odd for one to get lost made, Hajime began to complain about her being separated from Myuu.

"Oi oi, Tio. Don't separate from Myuu in such a place."

"This one kept her along her sight. It just that there were some rude fellows. And this one doth not want to let Myuu see a ghastly spectacle."

“I see. Then it couldn’t be helped... So, where are the suicide candidates?”

“Well, Master. This one has completely settled it down.”

“... Tch, well whatever.”

“... Doth Master truly believe thee will return her again?”

Apparently, there were some idiots who tried to kidnap Myuu. Because Myuu was a child from the Sea-dweller tribe, she put on a hood so she wouldn’t stand out in such a public location. As such, not knowing she was a child from Sea-dweller tribe protected by the Kingdom, there were people thinking of insolence. One of the

reasons might be because under the hood, she had the face of a young child with lovely features. It was unknown whether their objective was ransom or not though.

Hajime asked for the criminals' whereabout with a dark smile and the obviousness that he'd kill them, made Tio admonish him in half-amazement. In the beginning, Hajime disliked being called Papa from the bottom of his heart, but now he had become her Papa. When we arrive at Elisen, can Master separate from her... Hajime was more worrisome than Myuu.

Hearing the conversation between Hajime and Tio, Kouki's party stood in blank surprise. Though they understood Hajime had become

strong in the past four months because he experienced various things they couldn't even imagine, "How can he be a father!" Everyone was dumbfounded by this thought. The male students thought, "Just what kind of experiences has he piled up!?" and they moved their gazes to Yue and Shia, and next they looked at the black-haired, big-breasted, beautiful woman who suddenly appeared, and they clearly thought of something rude. This surprise might even be greater than the time Hajime displayed his peerlessness inside the dungeon.

If they calmly thought about it, it's unbelievable for him to make a child after being missing for just four months, but the various impacts in succession, along with

them just returning from life and death battle made them lost their composure and splendidly make such a misunderstanding.

Following that, one person unsteadily moved within Kouki's party. With a smile plastered on her face which didn't reach the eyes... it was Kaori. Kaori unsteadily approached him and suddenly, glare, her eyes opened wide then she caught Hajime.

"Hajime-kun! What does this mean!? Is she really Hajime-kun's daughter!? Who's the mother!? Yue-san!? Shia-san!? Or, is it that black-haired person!? Don't tell me, there are others!? Just how many did you make pregnant!? Answer me! Hajime-kun!"

Gripping Hajime's collar, Kaori shook Hajime in confusion. Although Hajime tried to say it was a misunderstanding and get away from her, he couldn't get away because Kaori gripped him with such ridiculous strength he had no idea she had. From behind Kaori, "Kaori, please calm down! There's no way she is his daughter, you know!" Shizuku admonished and pinioned her, but it seemed like Kaori did not hear her.

On the other hand, they could hear whispers and rumours coming from the surroundings.

"What's this? A scene of carnage?"

"It looks like, he got another woman pregnant while he has

another woman?”

“And not only one or two.”

“Doesn’t it seem like he got five pregnant at the same time?”

“Well, I heard he created a harem and made tens of women pregnant, I think?”

“But, he seemed to have hidden it from the wife.”

“I see... so today he got found out huh.”

“To create a harem... how enviable.”

“What an honorable man... he is better off dead though.”

Apparently, it turned out that

Hajime was a married brute who hid the fact that he was the master of a harem and made tens of women pregnant while keeping it a secret from his wife. Hajime, who was currently being shaken by Kaori, was looking at the ceiling with half-closed eyes, and then he leaked a deep sigh while patting Myuu, who wondered what happened and tilted her head.

* * *

The appearance of Kaori, whose head was buried in Shizuku's chest with a crimson face, looked as though she wanted to bury herself in a hole. Regaining her composure, she noticed she had shouted something unbelievable, and her embarrassment came in at mach-

speed. “It’s okay~, it’s okay,” the appearance of Shizuku comforting her was just like a mother... no, let’s stop here.

Hajime and the others had moved away from the entrance gate and arrived at the plaza in the town’s entrance. After his honor, which had gone up made a sharp fall in the public eyes, he reported to the branch head, Lorr, about the accomplishment of the request. And after two or three conversations, he decided to leave the town quickly to escape the various commotions. To begin with, he had only come here to deliver the letter from Ilwa to Lorr, so there was neither a need to resupply nor problem if they left immediately.

Kouki's party came back one by one after the leaving Hajime's party due to following Kaori. Kaori, still writhing in embarrassment, was desperately thinking about what she should do. She had to decide whether she would separate from Hajime as she was or follow him. Her feelings were more inclined to follow him. She didn't want to separate after they were finally reunited.

However, she could not make a clear decision because of her her guilt from leaving Kouki's party and how she was shaken by Hajime's changes. Moreover, there was the effect from her shaking being seen through and sneered at.

Kaori, just like what Yue did to her,

had guessed how strong Yue's feelings were towards Hajime. Following that, more than anything, how Hajime thought of Yue as someone important to him became a thorn that pierced and stuck onto her heart. The two thought of each other. Then, the one-sidedly ridicule, "So that's the extent of your feelings" doubted the strength of Kaori's shaken feelings.

She was wondering whether her feelings would lose to Yue's, and now, whether her feelings should be set aside so it would not become a nuisance. But more importantly, was she really looking at the current Hajime beside her? Or was she only thinking of the past Hajime? That, coupled with Yue's extraordinarily high abilities as his

partner and how dignified she was made Kaori... overwhelmed. In short, she had lost her confidence in herself as a woman, as a magic-user, and even her feelings towards Hajime.

Finally, it was the time for Hajime's party to leave, and for some reason the atmosphere was full of unrest. Noticing that and raising her face, Kaori saw around ten of men blocking their way.

"Oi oi, just where do you think you are going? You made our comrades into such rag-tags, do you think you can go without an apology? Ah? Ah!?"

The dirty looking armed man smiled inappropriately as he looked

at Tio and said. Apparently, they were the comrades of the fellows who previously tried to kidnap Myuu. They came to take revenge on Tio. But, those vulgar gazes were obviously not looking for retribution but something else.

In this town, adventurers should know of the commotion inside the guild and would not go looking for a fight against Hajime. That's why, these men were probably stray mercenaries.

Hajime and some others were gritting their teeth while being amazed at the template-like situation coming from these scum. However, mistaking that as shaking in fear, the failed excuses for mercenaries began to get carried

away.

Their gazes moved towards Yue and Shia, too. The gazes that seemed to licking them made Yue and Shia feel disturbed from the bottom of their hearts and hid behind Hajime. Misunderstanding their actions as being frightened, they began to threaten Hajime who was surrounded by Yue and the girls.

“BRAT! You understand right? Leave the women and quickly disappear if you don’t want to die! Whaa~t, I’ll return them if you properly apologize!”

“Well, they’ll already be broken by that time though.”

Thinking it was amusing,

GYAHAHA—, the men laughed. One of them was even lusting after the frightened Myuu, while another was lusting after the Rabbitman, a race usually used as an outlet for human sexual desire. And their fate had been decided now.

Just like the usual, the pressure came attacked the mercenary-like men like a giant waterfall that even made creaks in the air. However, being enraged and could not endure the men's speeches, Kouki moved out only to get wrapped inside the pressure and trembled. Then, he saw Hajime, not caring about him, walked towards the men from the corner of his view.

Though it was too late, the men tried to apologize because they

noticed they had picked a fight against someone they must not. But, on all-fours due from the pressure, they could not even open their mouths, so they could not apologize.

Hajime also didn't want to hear their words anymore. There was already enough reason for Hajime to become mad because they were thinking of making Shia an outlet for their lust, but their malice also had frightened Myuu, so that led to a decision of making them live a life more painful than death.

Hajime loosened the pressure a little and lined up the men who were on their knees, then he unhesitatingly and devilishly shot the symbol of a man starting from

the one at the edge. Furthermore, one by one the screaming, groin-holding men were kicked away and piled up in the corner of the plaza with their smashed pelvises. With this, they wouldn't be able to make child or even walk. It was up to each person whether they'd work hard in the future to stay alive or not.

The overly excessive and merciless counterattack made Kouki's party back away. The male students were especially affected and turned pale as they covered their nether regions.

Leering at Kouki's party, Hajime returned to where Yue and the girls were.

“Once again, a merciless one, huh~. As expected of Master. Even though those art women’s enemy, doesth not a little sympathy spring up?”

“Usually Hajime-san would not be angry right~. As expected, is it because of Myuu-chan? Looks like the overprotectiveness keeps rising.”

“... Nh, though there’s that... Hajime was also angry for Shia.”

“Eh!? Angry for my sake? Ehehe, Hajime-san... thank you very much~.”

“... Yue can immediately seen through me.”

“Nh... of course. It is because I am always looking at Hajime.”

“Yue…”

“Hajime…”

In the end, Hajime and Yue began to create their own world, which Shia retorted, then Myuu jumped to Hajime to be spoiled, and lastly Tio let out perverted remarks that ended in her panting from Hajime’s coldness. These spectacles were connected with Hajime as the core.

Kaori was silently watching Hajime who carried Myuu while being surrounded by Yue and the girls. With the previous spectacle, she understood that Hajime would not hesitate to use violence. It was something vastly different compared to the previous Hajime, and just by seeing it, it became a

denial of Hajime's kindness.

However, she wondered about the reason for Hajime's anger, which made him resort to violence. It was for the sake of the girls that were close to him, so they could enjoy themselves and laugh happily. Really, just how can a person who lost his kindness be surrounded by such smiles. Just how can such a young child yearn for him as a father.

Following that, the disturbance in her mind due to Hajime's changes had dissipated. To begin with, Hajime had returned to the dungeon for the sake of relieving Kaori by informing her his survival. And just like his words, he had returned to the dungeon only for

Kaori, but he didn't cast the others away. He saved Meld who received mortal wounds and told his companion to protect Kouki's party.

Kaori noticed it. The reason Hajime unhesitatingly displayed such violence and mercilessness towards his enemy was for the sake of protecting his important people. Of course Kaori herself might also be included inside, but it was a fact that Hajime was thinking for the others' sake. The proof was the smiles from the girls surrounding Hajime.

Kaori guessed it. Hajime had lost his hair color, right eye and left arm, surely because of the severe environment he had lived through. He certainly almost broken down

mentally and physically many times. No, it was possible... it was possible that he had already broken which resulted in his changes. Even so, Hajime walked on his path surrounded by those smiles.

That fact made the fog inside Kaori's mind disperse. She could hear the sound of puzzle pieces being rightfully placed. Just what I was hesitating about. There's "Hajime" before her. There's the boy that her heart always thought of. The one who was called "incompetent," but crawled from the abyss, gained enormous power, and came to save her.

There were parts that had changed, but there was also unchanged parts. However, that's something natural.

After all, people would always change with time, experiences, and meetings. That's why, there was no need for her to feel fear. There's no need for her to lose her confidence. There's no need for her to back away from him.

If there's something I don't know, then it'll okay if I come to know it while being by his side. Up until now, just like the time we were inside the class. There's no way the strength of my feelings will lose! There's nothing wrong with me joining the circle that surrounds Hajime! I won't let anyone laugh at my feelings anymore!

Resolution and determination were born inside Kaori's eyes. Shizuku, by her side, was smiling at her best

friend's change. Following that, she silently pushed Kaori's back. Kaori , with eyes radiating more "strength" than before, nodded to thank Shizuku and moved towards her next battlefield. That's right, toward her fight as a woman!

Hajime's party noticed that Kaori was walking towards them. Hajime thought she came to see them off, while Yue by his side, "Muh?," became wary as she frowned. "Arara?," Shia was looking at Kaori as her interest deepened, and Tio murmured, "Looks like it'll be a bloodbath huh~." Because she was apparently not coming to see them off, Hajime was looking at Kaori, frowning due at the ominous feeling.

“Hajime-kun, can I come with you, too? ... No, that’s not it, I will absolutely come with you, so please take care of me, okay?”

“... Hah?”

From the first words spoken, with neither preface nor wish-washing, it became a development where everything was decided and made Hajime’s eyes turn into dots. Inadvertently, he leaked such a stupefied voice. In place of Hajime, who could not immediately regain his composure due to being dumbfounded, Yue moved out.

“... You are not qualified for that.”

“What qualification? Is it to always think of Hajime? Then, I won’t lose

to anyone, you know?”

Kaori calmly replied Yue’s words. Yue, “Mmhmp,” made her mouth into ^.

Kaori matched her gaze to Yue’s, then she abruptly moved her unshakable gaze towards Hajime. Following that, she united her hand before her chest with blushing cheeks, took a deep breath, then with desperate and trembling voice, she spoke to him... thus she conveyed it.

“I love you.”

“... Shirasaki.”

Kaori’s expression was mix of embarrassment, worrying while she was expecting Hajime’s answer, and

happiness coming from being able to convey her feelings to him. Thus, with those mixed feeling, she didn't back away, displaying her determination.

That gaze, filled with determination and sincerity made Hajime answered her with serious eyes.

"I have a woman I am in love with. So I can't answer Shirasaki's feelings. Therefore, I can't take you with me."

Hajime's clear answer made Kaori immediately bite her lip as if she wanted to cry, but in the next moment, power was born inside the eyes that were about to spill tears and she raised her face. Thus she nodded to tell him she understood.

Behind Kaori, Kouki and the others were in blank surprise, agape, and in a pandemonium-like situation, but not minding them, Kaori spun her desired words.

“... Un, I know. It’s Yue-san, right?”

“Yeah, that’s why...”

“But, I don’t think that can be a reason for me not to be at Hajime-kun’s side.”

“What?”

“Because, Shia-san and the slightly strange Tio-san are also in love with Hajime-kun, right? Especially Shia-san, I feel she is pretty serious about it.”

“... That’s...”

“Even though Hajime-kun, with you already having your own special person, she still doesn’t give up and wants to be at Hajime-kun’s side, and also, Hajime-kun lets her be so. That’s why, it wouldn’t be a problem if I am there too, right? After all, my feelings for Hajime-kun… won’t lose to anyone.”

Saying so, Kaori turned her blazing, strong gaze towards Yue. What was expressed was, My feelings won’t lose to you! I won’t let you laugh at them!, and Yue could see Kaori’s strong will. That was definitely a declaration of war. It was a declaration that she’d steal the one and only “special seat” from Yue.

Receiving Kaori’s piercing gaze from the front, Yue, unusually,

turned her lips in a smile that could be understood by anyone as fearless.

“... I see, then come with us. And there I will teach you. Our differences, that is.”

“Not you, it’s Kaori.”

“... Then, just call me Yue. I accept Kaori’s challange.”

“Fufu, Yue. Don’t cry if you lose, kay?”

“... Fu, fufufufufu.”

“Aha, ahahahahaha.”

Yue and Kaori created a world of their own with a different meaning than the time Yue did it with

Hajime. Even though Hajime was the one confessed to, he was being put aside before he was aware of it, and, in such a manner, in the end it was decided Kaori would enter his party making Hajime look into the far distance. Seeing Yue and Kaori who were laughing together, Shia and Myuu by his side were hugging him, trembling.

“Ha-Hajime-san! Is something wrong with my eyes? I can see dark clouds and draconic lightning behind Yue-san!”

“... Isn’t that normal? Even I can see a katana holding Hanya behind Shirasaki.”

“Papaa~! Those Onee-chan are scaryy.”

“Haa haa, thee are somehow... if you turn your gazes to this one... ngh, can’t hold it.”

With Satan? appearing behind each of them, Yue and Kaori laughed with daunting pose. Were you those kinds of characters?, Hajime wanted to retort with that, but he decided to wait for them to stop while soothing Myuu, who was clinging to him, because those words would become a boomerang back at him. He is now the so called good-for-nothing.

But, there was someone who objected towards Kaori’s will... and of course it was the “Hero”, Amanokawa Kouki.

“Wa-Wait! Please wait a sec! I don’t

understand this. Kaori likes Nagumo? She wants to follow him? Eh? What does this mean? How, how did it suddenly come to this? Nagumo! You, just what have you done to Kaori."

"... the heck is with this one."

Apparently, Kouki could not admit the reality of Kaori falling for Hajime. It was not something that came out of the blue as Kouki was the only one who didn't notice it, but in Kouki's eyes, he only saw it as Kaori suddenly doing something strange and the cause being Hajime. Really, Kouki's mind that only saw things in the way that would be convenient for him made Hajime retort instinctively.

Being completely convinced that Hajime did something to Kaori, Kouki indignantly moved with partly drawn Holy Sword in hand which made Shizuku admonish him, with a gesture was as though she was enduring a headache.

“Kouki. Can’t you see Nagumo-kun didn’t do anything? Please think about it calmly. Though it looks like you didn’t notice it, Kaori has thought of him in that way since long ago. I mean, since the time we were still in Japan. Just try to think about what Kaori always talked about.”

“Shizuku... what are you saying... that’s, that’s because Kaori is kind, so she feels sorry for Hajime who was always alone, right? There’s

neither connection nor motive, so there's no way Kaori would like an otaku like Hajime."

Hearing Kouki and Shizuku's conversation, Hajime unexpectedly became agitated as that was said straight to his face, his cheek twitching.

Noticing the commotion from Kouki and the others, Kaori spoke towards Kouki and the classmates behind him to make herself clear.

"Kouki-kun, everyone, I am sorry. I know it is selfish of me... but I, I want to go with Hajime-kun by any means. That's why, I will leave your party. Truly, I am sorry."

Kaori said so as she bowed deeply,

making Suzu, Eri, Ayako, and Mao, the female circle, yell Kyaa– Kyaa–. Nagayama, Endou, and Nomura, the three who had guessed Kaori's feelings were waving their hands to tell her not to worry about it with wry smiles.

However, Kouki, of course, could not accept Kaori's words.

"It's a lie, right? After all, that's weird. Kaori has always been by my side... so shouldn't it be the same from now on too? Kaori is my childhood friend... that's why... it's natural for her to be by my side. Isn't that so, Kaori?"

"Umm... Kouki-kun. It is true that we are childhood friends... but, it doesn't mean we will be always

together, you know? I think this is the natural way…"

"That's right, Kouki. It's not like Kaori is yours, and it's Kaori herself that will choose what she does. So, drop it already."

Being told so by his two childhood friends, Kouki was dumbfounded. His gaze immediately moved towards Hajime. Hajime was looking in the distance, expressing that this had nothing to do with him. Beside Hajime were a beautiful woman and beautiful girls in attendance. Seeing that spectacle, Kouki's eyes began to gradually looking up. Inside him, he was thinking about his Kaori, and dark feeling he never felt before sprang up. Thus following his impulse, he

fully interpreted things at his own convenience.

“Kaori. You must not go with him. I am saying this for your sake. Just look at that Nagumo. He is attended by several girls, even a small child like that... moreover, he even made a girl from the Rabbitman tribe wear a slave collar. Even that black-haired woman called Hajime “Master” before. Surely, she was compelled to call him that. I am sure Nagumo is collecting women or something along those lines. He is the worst. He easily killed a person and he didn’t want to cooperate with us, his comrades, even though he has those powerful weapons. Kaori, you’ll only be unhappy if you go along with him. That’s why, it is better if you stay

here. No, just stay here. Even if you are going to hate me, I am going to stop you for your sake. I will absolutely not let you go with him!”

Kouki’s overly erratic objection made Kaori and the others dumbfounded. However, the heated up Kouki couldn’t be stopped. His gaze which was looking at Kaori to persuade her turned towards Yue and the girls by Hajime’s side as if he thought of something.

“You girls, too. There’s no more need for you to be by that man’s side. Come with me! I welcome people with abilities like you. Let’s save people together. Shia, was it? There’s no need to worry, I will immediately release you from slavery if you come with me. Tio

too, it's okay for you to not call him Master."

Saying so with a refreshing smile, Kouki outstretched his hand towards Yue and the girls. Shizuku was facepalming and looking at the sky while Kaori was covering her opened mouth.

Yue and the girls who received the invitation along with Kouki's smile were...

"""...""""

They were speechless. They averted their gazes from Kouki and rubbed both of their own arms. If one looked carefully, Yue and the girls were having goosebumps. In a way, they received considerable damage.

Even Tio said, “Somehow, this feels wrong...,” as she frowned at the cold feeling she felt.

Seeing their appearances, Kouki who outstretched his hand had his smile cramped. Far from looking at him, the girls were hurriedly hiding behind Hajime while looking disgustedly at him which shocked Kouki.

Then, that shock changed into anger which displayed in his action. He rashly drew the Holy Sword, aiming at Hajime. Kouki could no longer be stopped by words, he thrust the Holy Sword into the ground and pointed his finger at Hajime as he declared,

“Nagumo Hajime! Duel me! Throw

away your weapon and fight me barehanded! If I win, don't ever come close to Kaori again! Also, you must release those girls!"

"... Ouch, ouch, ouch. This is bad. It's a more painful hero than I expected. It looks like he couldn't see that he is being a pain though."

"What are you mumbling about! Are you scared?!"

Stabbing the Holy Sword into the ground and declaring a bare-handed duel after drawing the sword was surely because he felt that he'd lose to Hajime if they used weapons. Though it was actually unknown whether he did it intentionally or not... Yue, Shia, Myuu, Tio, Kaori and the others

were indeed taken aback by Kouki's speech and behavior.

However, Kouki firmly believed that he was in the right and got worked up on saving his childhood friend and the unhappy girls from Hajime which made him unable to notice the surrounding atmosphere. To begin with, the strong conviction that made him doing such a reckless thing was the "envy" he that he felt for the first time, and he was completely out of control.

Without hearing Hajime's approval, Kouki dashed out. Sighing, Hajime took two, three steps back. Seeing that, Kouki thought Hajime was frightened from fighting without a weapon and put more power into his dash. Just several steps before

his fist reached Hajime, Hajime lowered his hands, not reacting to anything in particular. Kouki thought Hajime couldn't react to him and was convinced of his victory.

At that moment,

THUUUMP!

"Kh!?"

Kouki disappeared.

More accurately, at the moment he put maximum power to his last step to put more power into his fist, he fell. He fell into a pitfall. At the beginning, the reason Hajime moved back two, three steps was to create transmutation magic array using his shoes to create a hole

with a four meter depth under the surface.

The pitfall was immediately returned into stone pavement after it swallowed Kouki. Next, explosions could be heard from under the surface. At the moment Hajime transmuted the pitfall, he used that opportunity to transfer flash grenade, shock grenade, paralyze grenade, and tear grenade from “Treasure Box” into the hole.

While he was underground, the impact from explosions attacked Kouki who tried to escape, then his vision went dark with the flash, his eyes and nose flooded from the tear grenade, and lastly his body was in agony and stiffening because of the paralysis.

Hajime silently used transmutation again and hardened the ground around Kouki as hard as the two-tailed wolf. And now, because he'd likely to die due to being deprived of fresh air, he created a small hole for ventilation.

During that time, to the onlookers, it looked like Hajime didn't do anything but stood only to take Kouki's resentment, and then Kouki rushed forward, alone which ended with him disappearing down the hole alone; it made him looked terribly... silly.

"Ah~, Yaegashi. He is still alive, so dig him out later."

"... I have a lot of things I want to ask... but, roger that."

Leave the troublesome Kouki to Yaegashi Shizuku!, it was a tacit understanding since the time they were in Japan. Hajime pushing the troublesome thing onto her made Shizuku leak a sigh while covering one of her eyes. Finally, the nuisance was gone.

... Was what he thought, but this time Hiyama's gang made a commotion. As for the reason, the hole left by Kaori was just too great. There was also the previous incident with the demon race woman, and they'd likely to die in the future if Kaori left them. That's why they repeatedly tried to persuade Kaori to remain with them. Especially Hiyama, he intensely objected. His appearance... was in a panic, as

though the thing he desired for so long which was about to come into his possession was disappearing.

Hiyama's gang of four realized it was difficult to persuade or change Kaori's decision, and this time they began to persuade Hajime to remain with them. We apologize about the past, so let's get along from now on, such and so forth was said unabashedly.

They didn't actually mean what they said, but they made friendly smiles as they snuck peeks at Hajime's mood, but not only Hajime, but Shizuku and the others were also disgusted by them. Within that situation, Hajime, for the first time looked at Hiyama's eyes from a close distance since

their reunion. Inside those eyes, maybe due to the effect of Kaori leaving, Hajime could see madness.

Shizuku and the others admonished Hiyama's gang and once again it turned into a commotion, but because there was such an opportunity, Hajime decided to talk to Hiyama to confirm the truth about that day and to resolve the current situation.

"Naa, Hiyama. Has your fire magic skill increased?"

"...Eh?"

The sudden question made Hiyama dumbfounded. However, his complexion gradually turned pale as he noticed the meaning behind

it.

“Wh-What are you saying. I am the vanguard... and my element with the highest aptitude is Wind.”

“Hee, I thought you were surely had a fire element.”

“A-Aren’t you mistaken? Just what are you trying to say all of a sudden...”

“Then, you must have liked fire element magic. Especially something like fireball. I wonder if you would unintentionally use it?”

“...”

Now, the color of Hiyama’s face had changed from blue to white. Seeing that reaction, Hajime was

convinced. Next, Hajime guessed his motive from his panicked attitude from Kaori separating from them. Well,as for why Hajime hadn't attacked Hiyama up till now was because he was sneaking looks at Kaori.

Hajime himself, currently, had not even a shred of feeling burning with revenge. Though he'd be merciless if one was hostile to him, he planned to leave Hiyama as he was. If he retaliated here, it would be troublesome as there was no value in being burdened by a dispute against Kouki's party just because of Hiyama. For Hajime, the existences of Hiyama and his gang were truly worthless just like the pebbles by the roadside.

Hajime moved away from the silent Hiyama and mercilessly informed Hiyama's gang, with Kondou and the others included.

"There's no need for you to apologize as I don't mind the past. For me, you guys are worthless. Thus I don't want to know what you are going to say. If you understand, scram now! You're so irritating!"

Although Kondou and the others were angered by Hajime's words, "Hiyamaaa. You should understand, right?," Hajime said so with full smile, and then Hiyama's body shook and he silently nodded, followed by him telling Kondou and the others to stop. Hiyama once again came to know that Hajime had noticed something about him,

including what Hajime didn't express, and he matched him.

Kondou and the others were dubious due at the sudden change in Hiyama's attitude, but Hiyama's abnormal attitude, as if he was killing his emotions, made them reluctantly give up on persuading Hajime.

Finally, truly finally, the nuisances who disturbed the departure of Hajime's party had gone. Kaori went back to the inn to get her luggage (Hajime used his "Pressure" to stop Hiyama's gang from following her). Leering at Ryuutarou and the others trying to dig Kouki up, Hajime now was talking with Shizuku.

“What can I say... I am sorry for everything. Also, let me thank you again. Thank you, for saving us, for surviving, and for coming here to meet with Kaori...”

Shizuku, who apologized about the trouble and thanked him for rescuing them and returning to Kaori, made Hajime laugh, inadvertently. Shizuku showed a dubious expression due to Hajime sudden burst of laughter. Her gaze was asking, “What is it?”

“No, sorry. What can I say, I thought you are worldly-wise as usual, so I inadvertently laughed. Even while we were in Japan, you were the one who quietly did the apologizing and thanking. It’s still the same, even in this different

world... but keep it in moderation or your wrinkle will increase, you know?"

"... You've been a big help. Also, you have considerably changed. To have that many girls to wait upon you, along with a daughter... I couldn't imagine this from you while we were still in Japan..."

"I only love one person though..."

"... I don't have the obligation to say anything and I also understand that it is not my place to say it... but at least I want you to take care of Kaori. I implore you."

"..."

Hajime didn't answer. More than that he didn't want to answer

Kaori's feelings, honestly, he never thought of letting her come along. But in the end, he let Yue have her way... but he wondered why the woman he fell for permitted one woman after another... Why did it come to this?, Hajime was looking into the far distance as he thought that he was spoiling Yue too much.

Towards Hajime, whose attitude said he didn't hear anything, Shizuku's spirit as a best friend raised a growl.

"... If you don't take care of her... it'll become serious matter."

" ? Serious matter? What do you..."

"Have you heard "White-haired, eye-patched Punisher"?"

“...What?”

“Or maybe, written as “Round of Destruction” and read as “Outbreak,” how about it?”

“Wait a sec, you, just what are you...”

“There are also others such as “Jet-black Tyrant” or “Transmutation Master of Red Thunder,” you know?”

“Y-Yo-You, don’t tell me...”

Shizuku suddenly began to enumerate unknown names, which made Hajime look dubious at the beginning. But, noticing Shizuku joyfully looking at Hajime from head to toe, he turned pale as he understood what she meant.

“Fufufu, right now I am a “God’s Apostle” and a member of the Hero’s party. What I said will surely spread. It is equal to the network of neighboring housewives. Well then, Nagumo-kun, what kind of nickname do you want... I will make one that fairly describes your appearance and grandly make it known, okay?”

“Wait, just, wait! Why, how did you know such a damaging thing!?”

“It is because I studied about it with Kaori. That girl wanted to talk with Nagumo-kun, so she studied otaku culture like manga and anime so they could become a topic of conversation. I went along with her every time... that’s why I’ve gathered quite the knowledge about

it. Certainly, people like the current Nagumo-kun are called “chuuni...””

“Stoop-! Please stop that”

“O-Oh my, it is more effective than what I imagined... looks like you are aware of it yourself.”

“Th-This devil...”

Hajime had already fallen to his knees. The black history that truly happened in his middle school years was revived. The memory that had been sealed deep inside him, “You rang?” said thus as it peeked out its face.

“Fufu, so, take care of Kaori, okay?”

“...”

“Fuu, Requiem of Ruin (Shotgun of Chaos), Revived Disaster (Reverse Calamity)...”

“Okay! I will do it, so please don’t make such painful nicknames.”

“Take care of Kaori, okay?”

“... At the very least, I promise that I won’t treat her unkindly.”

“Eeh, that’s enough for me. After all, it seems you’ll be mad at me if I go any further than this... if you break the promise, be prepared for a novel with you as the main character published in this world and Japan too, okay?”

“You, aren’t you actually the last boss here? You are, right?”

Hajime held his head as he was on the verge of going mad from embarrassment. Yue, the girls, and the other classmates that were looking at Hajime from a slight distance were shuddering at how Shizuku used only words to make the overwhelmingly powerful Hajime fall to his knees.

While Hajime was fighting against his dark history due to this and that from his appearance, Kaori came back, running. Next, she became pop-eyed when she saw Hajime hanging his head before Shizuku.

Worried about Shizuku, Kaori asked the details from Yue and they exchanged information. Finishing their conversation, Yue, “Muu~,” groaned at Shizuku who defeated

Hajime with only words. Kaori had also remembered that the two often talked with each other quietly... and she looked alternately between Hajime and Shizuku. Following that, the two reached a conclusion. Don't tell me, is she the last boss of this fight as a woman?, something like that.

Yue wore an indescribable expression and Kaori was worrying. Then, it was finally time for Hajime's party to leave. Shizuku, Suzu, the other female students, and Nagayama's party, along with Meld who finished reporting, were gathered at Hol-ad's entrance to see them off. Following that, when Hajime took out the magic-driven four-wheeler, all of them were once again surprised.

While Shizuku and Kaori mutually struggling to separate their hands in regret, Hajime took out a sword with a black sheath from “Treasure Box” and handed it to Shizuku.

“This is?”

“Yaegashi, you are losing the one who can spoil you, right? Then, just take it. Even if you are worldly-wise, you can’t be “healed (mentally)” from being separated from Shirasaki. Maa, there’s also the various things I am indebted to you for from Japan.”

Shizuku accepted the sword from Hajime and slowly drew it from its sheath, and a jet-black sword that seemed to absorb even light appeared. There was no blade crest,

it had a slight curve and became double edged around the tip. It resembled the sword called Shoukarasuma. Though Hajime only knew a little about Japanese swords, it was created similarly using transmutation just like the short swords he handed over to the Haulia.

“I can guarantee its strength because it was made from the compressed, hardest ore in this world, and its sharpness is at the level where even an amateur can cut steel by swinging it. About the maintenance... there’s no need to say it to Yaegashi, but please take care of it.”

“... Such an amazing thing... as expected of a Transmutation

Master. Thank you. I won't hold back and will accept it."

After one swing, two swings, the balance as it cut through the wind made Shizuku respond with admiration, and she honestly thanked him as she smiled. Truthfully, because Shizuku's swordsmanship was Yaegashi-styled, naturally it required a Japanese sword, and she felt disoriented every time she used her techniques using her previous sword. That's why she was truly happy to obtain a Katana which made her float a natural, lovely smile.

"... Last Boss?"

"... Shizuku-chan."

“Eh? What? You two, why are you looking at me with such eyes?”

Yue’s gaze, full of caution, and Kaori’s gaze, full of worry, made Shizuku flustered as she didn’t know the meaning behind them. Leaving behind that indescribable atmosphere, Shizuku and the others saw Hajime’s party out of Hol-ad.

The weather was good. Their destination was one of the Seven Great Dungeons «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» in «Guryuu-en Great Desert». With increasing liveliness from acquiring a new companion, Hajime continued his journey.

Chapter 81 : Madness and Jealousy

* * *

“Shit! Shit! What’s with this! What kind of joke is this!”

It was midnight. Inside a park located on the outskirts of the post town, Hol-ad, one boy was cursing in a hushed voice, punching one of the trees repeatedly. It was Hiyama Daisuke. Hiyama’s eyes were shaking intensely in hatred, agitation, and impatience. Those were truly ugly and impure eyes, from which it was not an

exaggeration to they were full of madness.

“As I thought, you really did lose your temper... well, I know it can’t be helped though. After all, your precious, precious princess Kaori was snatched by another man before your eyes, right?”

A voice filled with scorn and slight sympathy rang out from behind such a Hiyama. Fwip, Hiyama immediately turned around. Next, he momentarily raised an expression of relief when he recognized the other person was the one he meeting in secret, and, following that, with his fists clenched, he replied with a voice that was just like a beast’s howl.

“Shut up! Shit! This... this shouldn’t have happened! Why, why is that bastard alive!? Just why did he did that...”

“Don’t be distracted by yourself, I want to have a talk, you know? Also, it will become a serious matter if someone sees us meeting in secret.”

“... I, I don’t have anymore reasons to go along with you... my Kaori is already...”

In between the trees’ shadows created by the moonlight was a person’s silhouette, to whom Hiyama bitterly spoke as he pummeled his fists on the tree.

Hiyama cooperating with this

person was only because he heard that he would be able to make Kaori his own. That's why, with Kaori leaving, he had lost his reason to cooperate, and it was too late to threaten him with exposing his attempt to kill Hajime as the victim could have said it himself.

However, the person in the darkness smiled as its mouth turned curved into a crescent at such a Hiyama, and it once again tempted him just like the devil.

"If she is snatched then just snatch her back. Is it wrong? Fortunately, we have good bait here."

"...Bait?"

Not knowing what it meant,

Hiyama dubiously tilted his head which made that person grinned and nodded.

“That’s right, bait. Even if she puts priority on her feelings and parts from those comrades of hers... her best friends that were always by her side, her childhood friends... do you think she can just leave them be? Especially if she knows they are in a predicament.”

“You...”

“It is easy to call her back. So, there’s no need to be pessimistic about it. Especially in this case, even I got a chill... but I am glad that it resulted in something convenient for me. Yup, it could be said as a godsend. Shall we finish

everything once we return to the Imperial Capital? Then... you will surely obtain what you desire, you know?"

"..."

Though knowing it was useless, Hiyama glared at his accomplice that stayed in the shadow. Even receiving his gaze, the person before Hiyama laughed normally.

Though he didn't know all of this person's plan, from their previous words, Hiyama could have guessed that it'd involve injuring the other classmates. For their own objective, they could easily betrayed their comrades, with whom they shared joy and sorrow with. Following that, a chill ran down in his spine as he

couldn't feel any guilt from that person.

(A nasty person as always... but, I also cannot back down anymore... I must do it to get my Kaori back... that's all. There's nothing to hesitate about. This is for Kaori. I am the justice here.)

Hiyama only thought of himself and his confusion had already been disappeared. Because of his accomplice, he was made to look away from the thing he must see, believing that his action was justified, while it all stemmed from his desire for Kaori.

The silhouette turned silent as it understood Hiyama's feelings. Smiling, it waited for Hiyama's

answer.

“... Okay. Just like before, I will lend you a hand. However...”

“Aah, I understand. I will obtain what I desired, and you will obtain yours. Give and take, isn’t that a nice word? From now on is crucial. The case in the Imperial Capital too, can I leave that to you?”

Without minding Hiyama’s distorted expression, that person turned on their heels and disappeared, as if merging with the space between the trees. Afterwards, what was left was the fallen boy whose eyes were filled with darkness.

* * *

On the other hand, at the time the suspicious meeting happened in the outskirts of the town, another boy and girl were also standing under the moonlight.

They weren't in the location where the secret meeting happened, they were on a small, arched bridge, above one of the waterways that passed through between the shops and back alleys of the town. A lot of waterways were built for the large number of restaurants and service buildings, and the boy on the bridge was looking down on the flowing water's surface as it reflected the moon above it, under the moonlight.

More accurately, he wasn't looking but "drooping his head", moreover,

his expression was dark, far from its usual shine. The boy's appearance was just like that a person whose company bankrupted, incurred large amount of debt, and was now despairing about his future as he looked far into the distance, into the twilight. It was our hero, Amanogawa Kouki.

"... Do you not want to talk?"

A voice called out to Kouki who didn't look away from the moon reflected on the water surface. It was his childhood friend for ten years, the pair of the girl that went away, Yaegashi Shizuku.

Unlike Kouki, Shizuku was entrusting her back to the bridge's railing, looking up at the moon in

the sky. Towards the railing, her trademark ponytail was swaying, playing in the wind. Without looking at his childhood friend, and Shizuku who also not looking at him, Kouki replied as he continued to look at the moon.

“Is there something you want to say?”

“…”

There was no answer, no, Kouki just could not answer her. Even though he was looking at the moon reflected on the water’s surface, what was in his mind was the spectacle of Kaori speaking her feelings. Within her anxiety and rejoice, as if praying, she spoke her feelings without any hint of a lie,

which even convinced Kouki, whose denseness was at the level of a chronic disease.

Kouki and Kaori were friends for around ten years, but he was hurt when he saw her beautiful strength, he had never seen Kaori made such expressions. It was just like a bolt out of the blue for him.

Every time he recalled her expression, an unspeakable feeling sprang up in his mind. It was dark and heavy, a truly murky feeling. Unconditionally, without any basis, he believed his thought was a natural one. That was that, his childhood friend, Kaori, would always be by his side, without any change. It could be said he thought of Kaori as his. In other words, he

was jealous.

That jealousy, Kouki himself didn't know as to whether it came from love or just his desire to monopolize her, but the feeling that she was "snatched" from him was swirling in his mind, intensely.

However, it was Kaori herself that decided to go along with the one who "snatched" her away, Hajime (though he would surely object to it). Moreover, he didn't want to believe and tried to deny the existence called Hajime by challenging him to a duel where he was defeated. His misery, resentment towards Hajime, doubts about Kaori's feelings, and a lot of other feelings were mixed together, making Kouki's mind a mess, just

like the inside of kicked trash can.

Thus he kept looking at the water and unbeknownst to him, his other childhood friend was already standing beside him without saying anything... his reply from before was also truly not like him. Unable to find his next word, Kouki turned silent.

Sneaking a glance at such a Kouki, Shizuku frowned her brows and with an atmosphere that expressed "It can't be helped," she moved her mouth.

"... Right now, Kouki, you are being a pain."

"... A pain?"

Shizuku's unexpected reply made

Kouki inadvertently parrot her. Shizuku moved her gaze from the moon towards Kouki, and continued her words.

“That’s right. About Kaori, from the beginning she isn’t yours, you know?”

“... That’s... then, are you saying she is Nagumo’s?”

Prick, Kouki’s eyes were shaking as he guessed that, he desperately tried to object that as if cursing it. Hearing that, Shizuku answered with a strong forehead flick. “It hurt-!?,” Kouki instinctively covered his forehead, and leering at him, Shizuku scolded him with a cold voice.

“Idiot. Kaori is her own. Whatever she chooses, wherever she goes, it is up to Kaori to decide that. Of course, even who she wants to be with... is up to her own decision.”

“... Since when? Shizuku, you must have known that, right?”

Without asking “what do you mean,” Shizuku nodded.

“You know... Kaori met Nagumo-kun in middle school... Well, he must have forgotten about it... Rather I also don’t know in what kind of situation they met.”

“...What’s with that. Just what are you trying to say?”

“That is for you to ask Kaori yourself. After all, it is bad for me to

say it without her permission."

"Then, the reason Kaori was always talking to Nagumo in class was truly... that is... because she loves... him?"

"Hmm, that's right."

"..."

Shizuku easily told him the truth he didn't want to hear, which made Kouki make a reproachful gaze. However, Shizuku only thought of it as a passing wind. Angered by her attitude, just like a child throwing a tantrum, Kouki began to spit out what was in his mind.

"... Why, why is it Nagumo. When we were still in Japan, he was an otaku, unmotivated, and he nothing

special in terms of sports or studies either... always forcing his laugh, and being out of place... He took a noncommittal attitude whenever Kaori talked to him... he was an otaku... if it was me, I wouldn't treat Kaori coldly. I'd always think of her as important, and I would do my best for Kaori's sake... Besides, Nagumo was waited upon by those girls in such a manner, isn't he the lowest to treat them like that? Not only that, he is a murderer! He killed a non-resisting woman. So, do you think I was wrong!? That's right, it is strange for Kaori to like such a bastard after all. He surely must have "SWISh!" Guhah!?"

Heating up as he spoke, Kouki began to badmouth Hajime with fabricated truths which once again

awarded him a forehead flick (No Beat ver.) from Shizuku. What are you doing!?, was conveyed by Kouki's glare which was ignored by Shizuku who was wearing an amazed expression.

"Again, your bad habit is coming out, you know? I've kept saying until now that you should stop interpreting things at your own convenience.

"Interpreting things to my convenience... there's no way—"

"Haven't you noticed it yet? Kouki, you don't know anything about Nagumo-kun, right? You don't know anything about the time we were still in Japan or in this world... and those girls looked happy, no,

they really were happy, you see? But you ignored that fact and said something selfish... The current Kouki is only trying to make Hajime out to be a bad person who is unsuitable for Kaori. If that isn't called as interpreting things at your own convenience, then what is?"

"B-But... it is the true he killed a person."

"... At that time, even I was about to kill her. However, I couldn't muster my strength. Even in the future... if a similar thing happens, then I will surely swing my sword to kill, for the sake of surviving, for the sake of the people important to me. Though I don't know whether I can do it, since I will only know when the time comes... For now, the thing

I did was only attempted murder... but, are you going to despise me if I become a murderer?"

Shizuku's confession made Kouki speechless. His childhood friend, Shizuku, held a stronger sense of responsibility and justice than others, so he suddenly felt like she was a distant existence after hearing she was truly going to kill. However, Kouki shook his head when he noticed the shadow of anxiety and the fear of injuring a person in Shizuku's bitter smile.

Seeing Kouki's reaction, Shizuku continued her words which could be called a soliloquy.

"Certainly, his transformation is surprising... and thinking about his

character when we were still in Japan, it's not an exaggeration to say he's a different person... Well, even so, it looks like Kaori still thought of him as "Nagumo Hajime," and it looks like not all of him has changed... but one thing you must not forget, he fought that woman to save us and killed her in our stead."

"... Are you saying it is right to kill."

"I... I don't think it is right. A murder is a murder after all... I can neither justify it nor do I want to."

"Then..."

"Even so, we aren't qualified to criticize Nagumo-kun. It was no one's fault, but our own

weakness…”

In short, he should solve it himself if he has a problem with it. It was simply that he was not strong enough, so he couldn’t reach the result he hoped for. It was a mistake to complain about the result to the person he left everything with.

Noticing the unexpressed words, Kouki recalled that he could only crawl at the time Hajime displayed his peerlessness. Unable to object, he fell into sullen silence. His dissatisfied expression was obviously saying, “But, it is the truth that he killed a person!”

Towards Kouki’s obstinacy, with an admonishing tone, Shizuku tacitly

warned him about what had happened thus far, along with what she felt after coming to this world.

“I don’t hate Kouki’s straightforward sense of justice.”

“... Shizuku.”

“However. I think it’s about time for you to start doubting whether you are actually in the right.”

“Doubting my justice?”

“Certainly, a strong feeling is necessary to get things done. But, a distortion will surely appear if you don’t doubt it and just keep moving on, blindly believing on it. That’s why when that happens, I want you to react to it by wondering if you are really in the right, or whether

you still need to do it “even” if you know it is wrong... it isn’t bad if you continue to think like that, okay? ... truthfully, it is difficult to keep on living rightfully. Having come to this world, I cut lives even though they were demonic beasts... I’ve come to think so.”

Totally ignorant that Shizuku was thinking thus every time she killed a demonic beast, Kouki became pop-eyed.

“Kouki. You are not always the correct one and even if you are in the right. You should know that your rightfulness can become a lethal weapon. Well, the way you interpreted things at your convenience this time was not coming from your conviction of

“justice,” it was coming from your jealousy.”

“N-no, for me to feel jealous...”

“It is uncool to make an excuse to deceive me here, you know?”

“...”

Kouki once again cast his gaze down, looking at the moon on the water surface. However, the dark mood from a while ago had weakened, and he seemed to be thinking deeply about something. Anyway, he had avoided rushing into a spiral of negativity, and Shizuku leaked out a relieved sigh, knowing that.

Thus, thinking it was necessary to leave him alone for now, Shizuku

stopped leaning on the railing and tried to quietly leave the place. Then, Kouki's mutter came from behind Shizuku, who had already turned on her heels.

"Shizuku... you won't go anywhere, right?"

"... What's with this all of a sudden?"

"... Please don't go, Shizuku."

"..."

Kouki's words were as if he was petitioning her. It was a line that would made the female students in Japan and the girls of the Kingdom that fell for him go kya kya, but unfortunately, Shizuku only displayed an "amazed" expression.

He might be weakened by the feeling of loss because Kaori had gone... Shizuku looked over her shoulder, towards the blurring moon. It was the moon that was on water surface which Kouki had been looking at previously.

“At the very least I am not like the “moon”... I won’t just leave a man that is depending on me.”

Saying thus, Shizuku left the place. Left behind, Kouki watched the alley where Shizuku disappeared for a while, then once again, he looked at the moon reflected on the water surface. Next, he noticed the meaning behind her words.

“... I see... the moon reflected on the water’s surface.”

Flowers reflected on a mirror and the moon reflected on the water's surface. Those were words speaking about a thing that could be seen but not be reached, visible but with no substance, just like a reflection. He unconsciously looked at the reflected moon as Kaori, and certainly it was not something he could reach. Especially after seeing Kaori's expression at the time she confessed her feelings to Hajime.

Shizuki said she was not "the moon reflected on the water's surface". So, it's possible for him to reach her. However, her next words were severe. Kouki inadvertently made a wry smile. He thought about what he had just said to his childhood friend.

Kouki stopped looking at the reflected moon, he looked up at the sky. He had unconditionally believed that he could reach “it” if he just stretched out his hand, but he realized “it” was awfully quite far. Letting out a deep sigh, Kouki began to think about the words coming from his strict and gentle childhood friend.

To change or not to change... it was up to Kouki.

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~Arc epub version + Cover by bakanonymous ~